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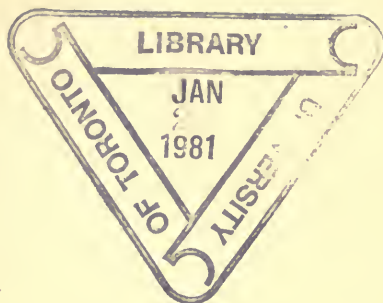
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STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON !

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERERS.

ON a certain sunny afternoon in May, when all the world and his wife were walking or driving in Piccadilly, two figures appeared there who clearly did not belong to the fashionable crowd. Indeed, so unusual was their aspect that many a swift glance, shot from carefully impassive faces, made furtive scrutiny of them as they passed. One of the strangers was an old man who might have been a venerable Scandinavian scald come to life again—a man thick-set and broad-shouldered, with features at once aquiline and massive, and with flowing hair and beard almost silver-white. From under his deeply lined forehead and shaggy eyebrows gleamed a pair of eyes that were alert and confident as with the audacity of youth; and the heavy white moustache and beard did not quite conceal the cheerful firmness of the mouth. For the rest, he wore above his ordinary attire a plaid of shepherd's tartan, the ends loosely thrown over his shoulders.

By his side there walked a young girl of about seventeen, whose singular, if somewhat pensive and delicate beauty, could not but have struck any passer-by who happened to catch sight of her. But she rarely raised her eyes from the pavement. What was obvious to every one was, first of all, the elegance of her walk—which was merely the natural expression of a perfectly moulded form; and then the glory of her hair, which hung free and unrestrained down her back, and no doubt added to the youthfulness of her look. As to the colour of those splendid masses—well, it was neither flaxen, nor golden, nor

brown, nor golden-brown, but apparently a mixture of all these shades, altering in tone here and there according to sunshine or shadow, but always showing a soft and graduated sheen rather than any definite lustre. Her face, as has been said, was mostly downcast; and one could only see that the refined and sensitive features were pale; also that there was a touch of sun-tan over her complexion, that spoke of travel. But when, by inadvertence, or by some forced overcoming of her native diffidence, she did raise her eyes, there flashed a revelation upon the world; for these blue-grey deeps seemed to hold light; a mild-shining light, timid, mysterious, appealing almost; the unconsciousness of childhood no longer there, the self-possession of womanhood not yet come: then those beautiful, limpid, pathetic eyes, thus tremblingly glancing out for a second, would be withdrawn, and again the dark lashes would veil the mystic, deep-shining wells. This was Maisrie Bethune; the old man beside her was her grandfather.

The young girl seemed rather to linger behind as her companion went up the steps towards a certain door and rang the bell; and her eyes were still downcast as she followed him across the hall and into an ante-room. When the footman came back with the message that his lordship was disengaged and would see Mr. Bethune, and when he was about to show the way upstairs, the girl hung back, and said, with almost a piteous look—

“I will stay here, grandfather.”

“Not at all,” the old man answered, impatiently. “Not at all. Come along!”

There were two persons in this large and lofty room on the first floor; but just as the visitors arrived at the landing, one of these withdrew and went and stood at a front window, where he could look down into the street. The other—a youngish-looking man, with clear eyes and a pleasant smile—remained to receive his guests; and if he could not help a little glance of surprise—perhaps at the unusual costume of his chief visitor, or perhaps because he had not expected the young lady—there was at all events nothing but good-nature in his face.

“My granddaughter, Maisrie, Lord Musselburgh,” the old man said, by way of introduction, or explanation.

The young nobleman begged her to be seated; she merely thanked him, and moved away a little distance, to a table on which were some illustrated books; so that the two men were left free to talk as they chose.

"Well now, that seems a very admirable project of yours, Mr. Bethune," Lord Musselburgh said, in his frank and off-hand way. "There's plenty of Scotch blood in my own veins, as you know; and I am glad of any good turn that can be done to poor old Scotland. I see you are not ashamed of the national garb."

"You remember what was said on a famous occasion," the old man made answer, speaking methodically and emphatically, and with a strong northern accent, "and I will own that I hoped your lordship's heart would 'warm to the tartan.' For it is a considerable undertaking, after all. The men are scattered; and their verses are scattered; but, scattered or no scattered, there is everywhere and always in them the same sentiment—the sentiment of loyalty and gratitude and admiration for the land of the hills and the glens. And surely, as your lordship says, it is doing a good turn to poor old Scotland to show the world that wherever her sons may be—in Canada, in Florida, out on the plains, or along the Californian coast—they do not forget the mother that bore them—no, but that they are proud of her, and think always of her, and regard her with an undying affection and devotion."

He was warming to his work. There was a vibration in his voice as he proceeded to repeat the lines—

"From the lone shieling on the misty island,
Mountains divide them and a world of seas;
But still their hearts are true, their hearts are Highland,
And they in dreams behold the Hebrides."

"Is that by one of your Scotch-American friends?" Lord Musselburgh asked, with a smile; for he was looking curiously, and not without a certain sympathetic interest, at this old man.

"I do not know, your lordship; at the moment I could not tell you," was the answer. "But this I do know, that a man may be none the less a good Canadian or American citizen because of his love for the heather hills that nourished his infancy, and inspired his earliest imagination. He does not complain of the country that has given him shelter, nor of the people who have welcomed him and made him one of themselves. He only says with Crichton's emigrant shepherd—

"'Wae's me that fate us twa has twined'

—‘twined’ is severed: perhaps your lordship is not so familiar with the dialect—

“‘Wae’s me that fate us twa has twined;
And I serve strangers ower the sea;
Their hearts are leal, their words are kind,
But, lass, it isna hame to me!’

Good men they are and true,” he went on, in the same exalted strain; “valued and respected citizens—none more so; but cut their hearts open, and you will find *Scotland* written in every fibre. It is through no ingratitude to their adopted country that a spray of white heather, a few bluebells, a gowan or two, anything sent across the seas to them to remind them of the land of their birth, will bring hot tears to their eyes. As one of them has written—

‘What memories dear of that cot ye recall,
Though now there remains neither roof-tree nor wall!
Alack-a-day! lintel and threshold are gone,
While cold ‘neath the weeds lies the hallowed hearthstone!
’Twas a straw-roofed cottage, but love abode there,
And peace and contentment aye breathed in its air;
With songs from the mother, and legends from sire,
How blithe were we all round the cheery peat-fire!
—Caledonia’s blue-bells, O bonnie blue-bells!’”

“You have an excellent memory,” Lord Musselburgh said, good-naturedly. “Those patriotic effusions seem to have impressed you.”

“That was written by the Bard of Amulree, your lordship,” continued the garrulous old man; “and a truer Scotchman does not breathe, though America has been his home nearly all his life. And there is many another, both in Canada and the United States. They may be in happier circumstances than they would have been in the old country; they may have plenty of friends around them: but still their hearts turn back to—

‘Where I’ve watched the gloamin’ close
The long bright summer days;
And doubted not that fairies dwelt
On Cathkin’s bonnie braes;
Auld Ruglin Brig and Cathkin braes
And Clyde’s meandering streams,
Ye shall be subject of my lays
As ye are of my dreams.’

Nor are they ashamed of their Scottish way of speech—ye may observe, 'my lord, that I've kept a twang of it myself, even among all my wanderings; and loth would I be to lose it. But I'm wearying your lordship," the old man said, in a suddenly altered tone. "I would just say that a collection of what the Scotch poets in America have written ought to be interesting to Scotchmen everywhere, and perhaps to others as well; for patriotism is a virtue that commands respect. I beg your pardon for encroaching on your lordship's time——"

"Oh, that's nothing," Lord Musselburgh said, easily; "but we must not keep the young lady waiting." He glanced in the direction of the girl who was standing by the table. She was turning over the leaves of a book. Then he resumed the conversation—but in a much lower key.

"I quite understand, Mr. Bethune," he said, so that she should not overhear, "what you wrote to me—that the bringing out of such a volume will require time, and expense. And—and you must allow me to join in, in the only way I can. Now what sum——?"

He hesitated. Mr. Bethune said—

"Whatever your lordship pleases."

The young man went into the front portion of the long apartment (where his friend was still discreetly standing behind the window curtains) and opened a despatch-box and sat down. He drew out a cheque for £50, enclosed it in an envelope and, coming back, slipped it into the old man's hands.

"I hope that will help; and I shall be glad to hear of the progress of the work."

"I thank your lordship," Mr. Bethune said, without any obsequiousness, or profusion of gratitude.

And then he turned to his granddaughter.

"Maisrie!"

The girl came away at once. She bowed to Lord Musselburgh in passing, without lifting her eyes. He, however, put out his hand, and said "Good-bye!" Nay, more than that, although he had previously rang the bell, he accompanied them both downstairs, and stood at the door while a four-wheeled cab was being called for them. Then, when they had left, he returned to the room above, and called lightly to his friend who was still standing at the window—

"Ready, Vin? Come along, then! Did you hear the old man and his poetry?—a harmless old maniac, I think. Well,

let's be off to Victoria; we'll get down to the Bungalow in time for a good hour's lawn-tennis before dinner."

Meanwhile old George Bethune and his granddaughter were being driven away eastward in the cab; and he was chatting gaily to her, with the air of one who had been successful in some enterprise. He had doffed his Scotch plaid; and, what is more, he had also abandoned the Scotch accent in which he had addressed 'his lordship.' It was to be a great book, this collection of Scotch-American poetry. It would enable him to pay a well-deserved compliment to many an old friend of his in Toronto, in Montreal, in New York. He was warm in his praises of this young Lord Musselburgh, and predicted a great future for him. Then he put his head out of the window and bade the driver stop—opposite the door of a wine-merchant's office.

"Grandfather," said the girl, "may I wait for you in the cab?"

"Certainly not," he answered with decision. "I wish you to see men and things as part of your education. Live and learn, Maisrie—every moment of your life."

Leaving the Scotch plaid in the cab, he crossed the pavement and went into the office, she meekly following. The wine-merchant was sent for, and presently he made his appearance.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Glover," old George Bethune said, with something of an air of quiet patronage, "I wish to order some claret from you."

The tall, bald, bland-looking person whom he addressed did not seem to receive this news with any joy; but the young lady was there, and he was bound to be courteous; so he asked Mr. Bethune to be kind enough to step into the back premises where he could put some samples before him. Maisrie was for remaining where she stood; but her grandfather bade her come along: so she also went with them into the back portion of the establishment, where she was accommodated with a chair. At this table there were no illustrated books to which she could turn; there were only bottles, glasses, corkscrews, and a plateful of wine-biscuits; so that she kept her eyes fixed on the floor—and was forced to listen.

"Claret, Mr. Glover," said the old man, with a certain sententiousness and assumption of importance that he had not displayed in speaking to Lord Musselburgh, "claret was in former days the national drink of Scotland—owing to the close alliance with France, as you know—and the old Scotch families

naturally preserve the tradition. So that you can hardly wonder if to one of the name of Bethune a sound claret is scarcely so much a luxury as a necessity. Why, sir, my ancestor, Maximilien de Bethune, duc de Sully, had the finest vineyards in the whole of France; and it was his privilege to furnish the royal table——”

“I hope he got paid,” the bland wine-merchant said, with a bit of a laugh; but happening to glance towards the young girl sitting there, and perceiving that the pale and beautiful face had suddenly grown surcharged with colour, he, instantly, and with the greatest embarrassment, proceeded to stumble on——

“Oh, yes, of course,” he said, hastily: “a great honour——naturally——the royal table—a great honour indeed—I quite understand——the duc de Sully, did you say?—oh, yes—a great statesman——”

“The greatest financier France has ever possessed,” the old man said, grandly. “Though he was by profession a soldier, when he came to tackle the finances of the country, he paid off two hundred millions of livres—the whole of the king’s debts, in fact—and filled the royal treasury. It is something to bear his name, surely; I confess I am proud of it; but our family goes far further back than the duc de Sully and the sixteenth century. Why, sir,” he continued, in his stately manner, “when the royal Stewarts were known only by their office—*Dapifer* or *Seneschallus* they were called—the Beatons and Bethunes could boast of their territorial designation. In 1434, when Magister John Seneschallus, Provost of Methven, was appointed one of the Lords Auditors, it was Alexander de Beaton who administered the oath to him—the same Alexander de Beaton who, some two years thereafter, accompanied Margaret of Scotland to France, on her marriage with the Dauphin. Yes, sir, I confess I am proud to bear the name; and perhaps it is the more excusable that it is about the last of our possessions they have left us. Balloray——” He paused for a second. “Do you see that child?” he said, pointing with a trembling forefinger to his granddaughter. “If there were any right or justice, there sits the heiress of Balloray.”

“It was a famous lawsuit in its time,” the wine-merchant observed—but not looking in Maisrie’s direction.

“It killed my father, and made me a wanderer on the face of the earth,” the old man said; and then he raised his head bravely. “Well, no matter; they cannot rob me of my

name; and I am Bethune of Balloray—whoever has the wide lands.”

Now perhaps there still dwelt in the breast of the suave-looking wine-merchant some remorse of conscience over the remark that had caused this pale and sensitive-looking young creature to flush with conscious shame; at all events he had quite abandoned the somewhat grudging coldness with which he had first received his customer; and when various samples of claret had been brought from the cellar and placed on the table, it was the more expensive that he frankly and fully recommended. Nay, he was almost pressing. And again he called to his assistant, and bade him fetch a particular bottle of champagne; and when that was opened, he himself poured out a glass and offered it to the young lady, with a biscuit or two, and seemed concerned and distressed when she thanked him and declined. The end of this interview was that old George Bethune ordered a considerable quantity of claret; and carried away with him, for immediate use, a case of twelve bottles, which was put into the four-wheeled cab.

Park Street, Mayfair, occupies a prominent position in the fashionable quarter of London; but from it, at intervals, run one or two smaller thoroughfares—sometimes ending in stables—the dwellings in which are of a quite modest and unpretentious appearance. It was to one of these smaller thoroughfares that George Bethune and his granddaughter now drove; and when they had entered the quiet little house, and ascended to the first floor, they found that dinner was laid on the table, for the evening was now well advanced. When they were ready, the frugal banquet was also ready; and the old man, seated at the head of the table, with Maisrie on his right, soon grew eloquent about the virtues of the bottle of claret which he had just opened. The girl—who did not take any wine—seemed hardly to hear. She was more thoughtful even than usual—perhaps, indeed, there was a trace of sadness in the delicate, pensive features. When the fresh-coloured servant-lass brought in the things, and happened to remain in the room for a second or two, Maisrie made some pretence of answering her grandfather; then, when they were left alone again, she relapsed into silence, and let him ramble on as he pleased. And he was in a satisfied and garrulous mood. The evening was fine and warm—the window behind them they had left open. He approved of the lodging-house cookery; he emphatically praised the claret, with the conviction of one who knew. Dinner, in fact, was half way

over before the girl, looking up with her beautiful, clear, limpid eyes—beautiful although they were so strangely wistful—ventured to say anything.

“Grandfather,” she asked, with obvious hesitation, “did—did Lord Musselburgh—give you—something towards the publication of that book?”

“Why, yes, yes, yes, certainly,” the old man said, with much cheerfulness. “Certainly. Something substantial too. Why not?”

The hot blood was in her face again—and her eyes down-cast.

“Grandfather,” she said, in the same low voice, “when will you set about writing the book?”

“Ah, well,” he made answer, evasively, but with perfect good humour, “it is a matter to be thought over. Indeed, I heard in New York of a similar volume being got together; but I may be first in the field after all. There is no immediate hurry. A thing of that kind must be thought over and considered. And indeed, my dear, I cannot go back to America at present; for my first and foremost intention is that you should begin to learn something of your native country. You must become familiar with the hills and the moorlands, with the roaring mountain-torrents, and the lonely islands amid the grey seas. For of what account is the accident of your birth? Omaha cannot claim you. There is Scotch blood in your veins, Maisrie—the oldest in the land; and you must see Dunfermline town, where the King sate ‘drinking the blood-red wine’; and you must see Stirling Castle, and Edinburgh, and Holyrood, and Melrose Abbey. Nebraska has no claim over you—you, a Bethune of Balloray. And you have some Highland blood in your veins too, my dear; for if the Grants who intermarried with the Bethunes were not of the northern Grants whose proud motto is ‘Stand fast, Craigellachie!’ none the less is Craig-Royston wild and Highland enough, as I hope to show you some day. And Lowland or Highland, Maisrie, you must wear the snood when you go north; a young Scotch lass should wear the snood; yes, yes, the bit of blue ribbon will look well in your hair. Melrose,” he rambled on, as he filled his glass again, “and Maxwellton Braes; Yarrow’s Banks; and fair Kirkconnel Lea: a storied country: romance, pathos, tragic and deathless music conjured up at every footstep. Instead of the St. Lawrence, you shall have the murmur of the Tweed: instead of Brooklyn—the song-haunted shores of Colonsay! But there is one place

that with my will you shall never visit—no, not while there are strangers and aliens there. You may wander all over Scotland—north, south, east, and west—but never, never while I am alive, must you ask to see ‘the bonny mill-dams o’ Balloray.’”

She knew what he meant; she did not speak. But presently—perhaps to draw away his thoughts from that terrible lawsuit which had had such disastrous consequences for him and his—she said—

“I hope, grandfather, you won’t think of remaining in this country on my account. Perhaps it is better to read about those beautiful places, and to dream about them, than to see them—you remember ‘Yarrow Unvisited.’ And indeed, grandfather, if you are collecting materials for that book, why should we not go back at once? It would be dreadful if—if—the other volume were to come out first—and you indebted to Lord Musselburgh, or any one else; but if yours were written and published—if you could show them you had done what you undertook to do, then it would be all perfectly right. For you know, grandfather,” she continued, in a gently persuasive and winning voice, “no one could do it as well as you! Who else has such a knowledge of Scotland and Scottish literature, or such a sympathy with Scottish music and poetry? And then your personal acquaintance with many of those writers—who used to welcome you as one of themselves—who else could have that? You could do it better than any one, grandfather; and you have always said you would like to do something for the sake of Scotland; and here is the very thing ready to your hand. Some other time, grandfather,” she pleaded, with those beautiful clear eyes turned beseechingly upon him, “some other time you will take me to all those beautiful places. It is not as if I had come back home; I have hardly ever had a home anywhere; I am as well content in Montreal or Toronto as anywhere else. And then you could get all the assistance you might need over there—you could go to your various friends in the newspaper offices, and they would give you information.”

“Yes, yes; well, well,” he said, peevishly; “I am not a literary hack, to be driven, Maisrie. I must have my own time. I made no promise. There, now, get me my pipe; and bring your violin; and play some of those Scotch airs. Yes, yes; you can get at the feeling of them; and that comes to you through your blood, Maisrie—no matter where you happen to be born.”

Twilight had fallen. At the open window, with a long clay pipe, as yet unlit, in his fingers, old George Bethune sate and stared out into the semi-darkness, where all was quiet now, for the carriages from the neighbouring mews had long ago been driven away to dinner-parties and operas and theatres. And in the silence, in the dusky part of the room, there arose a low sound, a tender-breathing sound of most exquisite pathos, that seemed to say, as well as any instrument might say—

“I’m wearin’ awa’, Jean,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, Jean,
I’m wearin’ awa’,
To the land o’ the leal;
There’s nae sorrow there, Jean,
There’s neither cauld nor care, Jean,
The day’s aye fair
In the land o’ the leal.”

Most tenderly she played, and slowly; and with an absolute simplicity of tone.

“There’s Scotch blood in your veins, Maisrie—Scotch blood,” he said, approvingly, as the low-vibrating notes ceased.

And then again in the darkness another plaintive wail arose—it was the Flowers o’ the Forest this time—and here the old man joined in, singing in a sort of undertone, and with a sufficiently sympathetic voice:

“I’ve heard the liltin’ at our yowe-milkin’,
Lasses a-liltin’, before the dawn o’ day;
But now there’s a moanin’ on ilka green loanin’;
The Flowers o’ the Forest are a’ wede away.
* * * *

“We hear nae mair liltin’ at our yowe-milkin’,
Women and bairns are dowie and wae;
Sighin’ and moanin’ on ilka green loanin’—
The Flowers o’ the Forest are a’ wede away.”

“Yes, yes,” he said, as he rose and came away from the window, “it is the Scotch blood that tingles, it is the Scotch heart that throbs. ‘Yestreen, when to the trembling strings, the dance gaed through the lichted ha’——’ Who but a Scotchman could have written that? Well, now, Maisrie, we’ll have the gas; and you can get out the spirits; and we’ll try some of the livelier airs. There’s plenty of them, too, as befits a daring and energetic people—a nation of fighters. They were not always bewailing their losses in the field.” And

therewith the old man, pacing up and down before the empty fire-place, began to sing, with upright head and gallant voice—

“Loudon’s bonnie woods and braes,
I maun leave them a’, lassie;
Wha can thole when Britain’s faes
Would gie Briton law, lassie?
Wha would shun the field o’ danger?
Wha to fame would live a stranger?
Now when freedom bids avenge her,
Wha would shun her ca’, lassie?”

Maisrie Bethune had laid aside her violin; but she did not light the gas. She stood there, in the semi-darkness, in the middle of the room, timidly regarding her grandfather, and yet apparently afraid to speak. At last she managed to say—

“Grandfather—you will not be angry——?”

“What’s this, now?” he said, wheeling round and staring at her, for the peculiarity of her tone had caught his ear.

“Grandfather,” she continued, in almost piteous embarrassment. “I—I wish to say something to you—I have been thinking about it for a long while back—and yet afraid you mightn’t understand—you might be angry——”

“Well, well, what is it?” he said, impatiently. “What are you dissatisfied with? I don’t see that you’ve much to complain of, or I either. We don’t live a life of grandeur; nor is there much excitement about it; but it is fairly comfortable. I consider we are very well off.”

“We are too well off, grandfather,” she said, sadly.

He started at this, and stared at her again.

“What do you mean?”

“Grandfather,” she said, in the same pathetic voice, “don’t you see that I am no longer a child. I am a woman. And I am doing nothing. Why did you give me so careful an education if I am not to use it? I wish to earn something—I—I wish to keep you and me, grandfather——”

The stammering sentences ceased: he replied slowly, and perhaps a trifle coldly—

“Why did I have you carefully educated? Well, I should have thought you might have guessed—might have understood. But I will tell you. I have given you what education was possible in our circumstances in order to fit you for the station which some day you may be called upon to fill. And if not, if it is fated that injustice and iniquity are to be in our case perpetual, at all events you must be worthy of the name you

bear. But it was not as an implement of trade," he continued, more warmly, "that I gave you such education as was possible in our wandering lives. What do you want to do? Teach music? And you would use your trained hand and ear—and your trained soul, which is of more importance still—to drum mechanical rudiments into the brats of some bourgeois household? A fit employment for a Bethune of Balloray!"

She seemed bewildered—and agonised.

"Grandfather, I must speak! I must speak! You may be angry or not—but—but I am no longer a child—I can see how we are situated—and—and if it is pride that causes me to speak, remember who it is that has taught me to think of our name. Grandfather, let us begin a new life! I can work—I am old enough to work—I would slave my fingers to the bone for you! Grandfather, why should you accept assistance from any one?—from Lord Musselburgh or any one? No, I do not blame you—I have always thought that everything you did was right—and kind and good; but I cannot be a child any longer—I must say what I think and feel. Grandfather——"

But here the incoherent appeal broke down; she fell on her knees before him, and clasped her hands over her face; and in the dark the old man—stern and immovable—could hear the sound of her violent sobbing.

"I will work—oh, I will work night and day, grandfather," she continued, wildly, "if only you will take my money and not from any one else! I will go on the stage—I will turn dressmaker—I will go anywhere or do anything—and work hard and hard—if only you will consent! There would not be so much sacrifice, grandfather—a little, not much—and don't you think we should be all the happier? I have spoken at last, grandfather—you will forgive me! I could not keep silent any longer. It has been weighing on my heart—and now—now you are going to say yes, grandfather—and to-morrow—to-morrow we begin differently. We are so much alone—let us live for each other—let us be independent of every one! Now you are going to say yes, grandfather—and indeed, indeed I will work for both of us, oh, so gladly!——"

"Have you finished?" he asked.

She rose, and would have seized his hand to enforce her appeal, but he withdrew a step, and motioned her to be seated.

"I am glad of this opportunity," he said, in a formal and measured fashion. "You say you have become a woman; and it is natural you should begin and think for yourself; hitherto

I have treated you as a child, and you have obeyed and believed implicitly. As for your immediate wish, I may say at once that is impossible. There is no kind of work for which you are fitted—even if I were prepared to live on your earnings, which I am not. The stage? What could you do on the stage? Do you think an actress is made at a moment's notice? Or a dressmaker either? How could you turn dressmaker to-morrow?—because you can hem handkerchiefs? And as for making use of your education, do you know of the thousands of girls whose French and Italian and music are as good as yours, and who can barely gain their food by teaching?—”

He altered his tone; and spoke more proudly.

“But what I say is this, that you do not understand, you have not yet understood, my position. When George Bethune condescends to accept assistance, as you call it, he receives no favour, he confers an honour. I know my rights and stand on them; yes, and I know my wrongs—and how trifling the compensations ever likely to be set against them. You spoke of Lord Musselburgh; but Lord Musselburgh—a mushroom peer—the representative of a family dragged from nothingness by James VI.—Lord Musselburgh knew better than you—well he knew—that he was honouring himself in receiving into his house a Bethune of Balloray. And as for his granting me assistance, that was his privilege, his opportunity, his duty. Should not I have done the like, and gladly, if our positions had been reversed? *Noblesse oblige*. I belong to his order—and to a family older by centuries than his. If there was a favour conferred to-day at Musselburgh House, it was not on my shoulders that it fell.”

He spoke haughtily, and yet without anger; and there was a ring of sincerity in his tones that could not be mistaken. The girl sat silent and abashed.

“No,” said he, in the same proud fashion; “during all my troubles, and they have been more numerous than you know or need ever know, I have never cowered, or whimpered, or abased myself before any living being. I have held my head up. My conscience is clear towards all men. ‘Stand fast, Craig-Royston!’ it has been with me—and shall be!”

He went to the window and shut it.

“Come, light the gas, Maisrie; and let us talk about something else. What I say is this, that if any one, recognising the injustice that I and mine have suffered, should feel it due to himself, due to humanity, to make some little reparation, why,

that is as between man and man—that ought to be considered his privilege; and I take no shame. I ask for no compassion. The years that I can hope for now must be few; but they shall be as those that have gone before. I abase myself before no one. I hold my head erect. I look the world in the face; and ask which of us has the greater cause to complain of the other. ‘Stand fast, Craig-Royston!’—that has been my motto; and so, thank God, it shall be to the end!”

Maisrie lit the gas, and attended to her grandfather’s other wants—in a mechanical sort of way. But she did not take up the violin again. There was a strangely absent look on the pale and beautiful and pensive face.

CHAPTER II.

NEIGHBOURS.

THE young man whom Lord Musselburgh had hailed came into the middle of the room. He was a handsome and well-made young fellow of about three or four-and-twenty, with finely-cut and intelligent features, and clear grey eyes that had a curiously straightforward and uncompromising look in them, albeit his manner was modest enough. At the present moment, however, he seemed somewhat perturbed.

“Who were those two?” he said, quickly.

“Didn’t you listen while the old gentleman was declaiming away?” Lord Musselburgh made answer. “An enthusiastic Scot, if ever there was one! I suppose you never heard of the great Bethune lawsuit?”

“But the other—the girl?”

“His granddaughter, I think he said.”

“She is the most beautiful human creature I ever beheld!” the young man exclaimed, rather breathlessly.

His friend looked at him—and laughed.

“That’s not like you, Vin. Take care. The Hope of the Liberal Party enmeshed at four-and-twenty—that wouldn’t do! Pretty—oh, yes, she was pretty enough, but shy: I hardly saw anything of her. I dare say her pretty face will have to be her

fortune; I suspect the poor old gentleman is not overburdened with worldly possessions. He has his name, however; he seems proud enough of that—and I shouldn't wonder if it had made friends for him abroad. They seem to have travelled a good deal."

While he was speaking his companion had mechanically lifted from the table the card which old George Bethune had sent up. The address in Mayfair was pencilled on it. And mechanically the young man laid down the card again.

"Well, come along, Vin—let's get to Victoria."

"No, if you don't mind, Musselburgh," said the other, with downcast eyes, and something of embarrassment, "I would rather—not go down to the Bungalow to-night. Some other time—it is so good of you to be always asking me down——"

"My dear fellow," the young nobleman said, looking at his friend curiously, "what is the matter with you? Are you in a dream? Are you asleep? Haven't I told you that —— is coming down by a late train to-night; and isn't all the world envying you that the great man should make such a protégé and favourite of you? Indeed you must come down; you can't afford to lose such a chance. We will sit up for him; and you'll talk to him during supper; and you'll listen to him for hours after if he is in the humour for monologues. Then to-morrow morning you'll take him away bird's-nesting—he is as eager for any new diversion as a schoolboy; and you'll have him all to yourself; and one of these days, before you know where you are, he'll hand you a Junior Lordship. Or is it the Under-Secretaryship at the Home Office you're waiting for? You know, we're all anxious to see how the new experiment will come off. The young man unspoiled by Oxford or Cambridge—untainted by landlord sentiment—trained for public life on first principles: one wants to see how all this will work in practice. And we never dictate—oh, no, we never dictate to the constituencies; but when the public notice from time to time in the newspapers that Mr. Vincent Harris was included in ——'s dinner-party on the previous evening, then they think; and perhaps they wonder when that lucky young gentleman is going to take his seat in the House of Commons. So really, my dear Vin, you can't afford to throw away this chance of having —— all to yourself. I suppose he quite understands that you are not infected with any of your father's Socialistic theories? Of course it's all very well for an enormously rich man like your father to play with Communism—it

must be an exciting sort of amusement—like stroking a tiger's tail and wondering what will happen in consequence; but you must keep clear of that kind of thing, my boy. Now, come along——”

“Oh, thank you, Musselburgh,” the young man said, in the same embarrassed fashion, “but if you'll excuse me—I'd rather stay in town to-night.”

“Oh, very well,” the other said good-naturedly, “I shall be up in a day or two again. By the way, the Four-in-Hand Club turns out on Saturday. Shall I give you a lift—and we'll go down to Hurlingham for the polo? Mrs. Ellison is coming.”

“Oh, thanks—awfully good of you—I shall be delighted,” the young man murmured; and a few seconds thereafter the two friends had separated, Lord Musselburgh driving off in a hansom to Victoria-station.

This young Vincent Harris who now walked away along Piccadilly towards Hyde Park was in a sort of waking trance. He saw nothing of the people passing by him, nor of the carriages, nor of the crowd assembled at the corner of the Row, expecting the Princess. He saw a pale and pathetic face, a dimly-outlined figure standing by a table, a chastened splendour of girlish hair, an attitude of meekness and diffidence. Once only had he caught a glimpse of the beautiful, clear, blue-grey eyes—when she came in at the door, looking startled almost; but surely a man is not stricken blind and dumb by a single glance from a girl's wondering or enquiring eyes? Love at first sight?—he would have dismissed the suggestion with anger, as an impertinence, a profanation. It was not love at all: it was a strange kind of interest and sympathy she had inspired—compassionate almost, and yet more reverent than pitiful. There appeared to be some mysterious and subtle appeal in her very youth: why should one so young be so solitary, so timid, sheltering herself, as it were, from the common gaze? Why that touch of pathos about a mouth that was surely meant to smile?—why the lowered eyelashes?—was it because she knew she was alone in this great wilderness of strangers, in this teeming town? And he felt in his heart that this was not the place for her at all. She ought to have been away in sunny meadows golden with buttercups, with the laughter of young children echoing around her, with the wide air fragrant with the new-mown hay, with thrushes and black-birds piping clear from amidst the hawthorn boughs. Who had imprisoned this beautiful child, and made a white slave of her,

and brought her into this great roaring market of the world? And was there no one to help?

But it was all a perplexity to him; even as was this indefinable concern and anxiety about one to whom he had never even spoken a word. What was there in that pensive beauty that should so strangely trouble him? She had made no appeal to him; their eyes could scarcely be said to have met, even in that brief moment; her cruel fate, the tyranny of her surroundings, her pathetic resignation, were all part and parcel of a distracted reverie, that seemed to tear his heart asunder with fears, and indignation, and vows of succour. And then—somehow—amidst this chaos and bewilderment—his one desire was that she should know he wished to be her friend—that some day—oh, some wild white day of joy!—he should be permitted to take her hand and say “Do not be so sad! You are not so much alone. Let me be by your side for a little while—until you speak—until you tell me what I can do—until you say ‘Yes, I take you for my friend!’”

He had wandered away from the fashionable crowd—pacing aimlessly along the unfrequented roadways of the Park, and little recking of the true cause of the unrest that reigned in his bosom. For one thing, speculations about love or marriage had so far concerned him but slightly; these things were too remote; his aspirations and ambitions were of another sort. Then again he was familiar with feminine society. While other lads were at college, their thoughts intent on cricket, or boating, or golf, he had been kept at home with masters and teachers to fit him for the practical career which had been designed for him; and part of the curriculum was that he should mix freely with his kind, and get to know what people of our own day were thinking, not what people of two thousand years ago had been thinking. One consequence of this was that ‘Vin’ Harris, as he was universally called, if he did not know everything, appeared to know everybody; and of course he was acquainted with scores on scores of pretty girls—whom he liked to look at when, for example, they wore a smart lawn tennis costume, and who interested him most perhaps when they were saucy; and also he was acquainted with a considerable number of young married ladies, who were inclined to pet him, for he was good-natured, and easy-mannered, and it may be just a little careless of their favour. But as for falling seriously in love (if there were such a thing) or perplexing himself with dreams of marriage—that was far

from his scheme of life. His morning companions were Spencer, Bain, John Mill, Delolme, Hallam, Freeman, and the like; during the day he was busy with questions relating to food supply, to the influence of climate on character, the effect of religious creeds on mental development, the protection and cultivation of new industries, and so forth; then in the evening he was down at the House of Commons a good deal, especially when any well-known orator was expected to speak; and again he went to all kinds of social festivities, particularly when these were of a political cast, or likely to be attended by political people. For Vin Harris was known to be a young man of great promise and prospects; he was received everywhere; and granted a consideration by his elders which was hardly justified by his years. That he remained unspoiled—and even modest in a degree unusual at his age—may be put down to his credit, or more strictly to the fortunate accident of his temperament and disposition.

How long he walked, and whither he walked, on this particular evening he hardly knew; but as daylight waned he found himself in Oxford-street, and over there was Park-street. Well enough he remembered the address pencilled on the visiting-card; and yet he was timorous about seeking it out; he passed and went on—came back again—glanced nervously down the long thoroughfare—and then resumed his aimless stroll, slowly and reluctantly. To these indecisions and hesitations there came the inevitable climax: with eyes lowered, but yet seeming to see everything around him and far ahead of him, he went down Park-street until he came to the smaller thoroughfare named on the card; and there, with still greater shamefacedness, he paused and ventured to look at the house that he guessed to be the abode of the old man and his granddaughter. Well, it was a sufficiently humble dwelling; but it was neat and clean; and in the little balcony outside the first floor were a number of pots of flowers—lobelias, ox-eye daisies, and musk. The window was open, but he could hear nothing. He glanced up and down the small street. By this time the carriages had all been driven away to dinner-party and theatre; a perfect silence prevailed everywhere; there was not a single passer-by. It was a quiet corner, a restful haven, these two lonely creatures had found, after their varied buffetings about the world. And to this young man, who had just come away from the roar of Oxford-street and its surging stream of human life, there seemed something singularly fascinating and soothing in the stillness. He began to think that he, too, would like to escape into this

retreat. They would not object to a solitary companion?—to a neighbour who would be content to see them, from the other side of the way, at the window now and again, or perhaps to say “Good morning!” or “Good evening!” as they passed him on the pavement? He could bring his books; here would be ample opportunity for study; there were far too many distractions and interruptions at his father’s house. And then—after weeks and weeks of patient waiting—then perhaps—some still evening—he might be invited to cross over? In the hushed little parlour he would take his seat—and—oh! the wonder and entrancement of it—he privileged to sit and listen, and hear what the wanderers, at rest at last, had to say of the far and outer world they had left behind them. He did not know what she was called; but he thought of several names, and each one grew beautiful—became possessed of a curious interest—when he guessed that it might be hers.

Suddenly the silence sprung into life; some one seemed to speak to him; and then he knew that it was a violin—being played in that very room. He glanced up towards the open window; he could just make out that the old man was sitting there, within the shadow; therefore it must be the girl herself who was playing, in the recess of the chamber. And in a sort of dream he stood and listened to the plaintive melody—hardly breathing—haunted by the feeling that he was intruding on some sacred privacy. Then, when the beautiful, pathetic notes ceased, he noiselessly withdrew with bowed head. She had been speaking to him, but he was bewildered; he hardly could tell what that trembling, infinitely sad voice had said.

He walked quickly now; for in place of those vague anticipations and reveries, a more definite purpose was forming in his brain; and there was a certain joyousness in the prospect. The very next morning he would come up to this little thoroughfare, and see if he could secure lodgings for himself, perhaps opposite the house where the old man and his granddaughter lived. It was time he was devoting himself more vigorously to study; there were too many people calling at the big mansion in Grosvenor Place; the frivolities of the fashionable world were too seductive. But in the seclusion of that quiet little quarter he could give himself up to his books; and he would know that he had neighbours; he might get a glimpse of them from time to time; that would lighten his toil. Then, when Mary Bethune—he had come to the conclusion that Mary was her name, and had made not such a bad guess, after all—when

Mary Bethune played one of those pathetic Scotch airs, he would have a better right to listen; he would contentedly put down Seaman's "Progress of Nations," and go to the open window, and sit there till the violin had ceased to speak. It was a most excellent scheme; he convinced himself that it would work right well—because it was based on common sense.

When he arrived at the great house in Grosvenor Place, he went at once into the dining-room, and found, though not to his surprise, that dinner was just about over. There were only three persons seated at the long table, which was sumptuously furnished with fruit, flowers, and silver. At the head was Vin Harris's father, Mr. Harland Harris, a stout, square-set, somewhat bourgeois-looking man, with a stiff, pedantic, and pompous manner, who nevertheless showed his scorn of conventionalities by wearing a suit of grey tweed; on his right sate his sister-in-law, Mrs. Ellison, a remarkably pretty young widow, tall and elegant of figure, with wavy brown hair, shrewd blue eyes, and a most charming smile that she could use with effect; the third member of the group being Mr. Ogden, the great electioneerer of the north, a big and heavy man, with Yorkshire-looking shoulders, a bald head, and small, piggish eyes set in a wide extent of face. Mr. Ogden was resplendent in evening dress, if his shining shirt-front was somewhat billowy.

"What's this now?" said the pretty Mrs. Ellison to the young man, as he came and pulled in a chair and sate down by her. "Haven't you had any dinner?"

"Good little children come in with dessert," said he, as he carelessly helped himself to some olives and a glass of claret. "It's too hot to eat food—unusual for May, isn't it? Besides, I had a late luncheon with Lord Musselburgh."

"Lord Musselburgh?" put in Mr. Ogden. "I wonder when his lordship is going to tell us what he means to be—an owner of racehorses, or a yachtsman, or a statesman? It seems to me he can't make up his own mind; and the public don't know whether to take him seriously or not."

"Lord Musselburgh," said Vincent, firing up in defence of his friend, "is an English gentleman who thinks he ought to support English institutions:—and I dare say that is why he does not find saving grace in the caucus."

Perhaps there was more rudeness than point in this remark; but Mrs. Ellison's eyes laughed—decorously and unobserved. She said aloud—

"For my part, I consider Lord Musselburgh a very admirable

young man: he has offered me the box-seat on his coach at the next meet of the Four-in-Hand Club."

"And are you going, aunt?" her nephew asked.

"Yes, certainly."

"Rather rash of Musselburgh, isn't it?" he observed in a casual sort of way.

"Why?"

"What attention is he likely to pay to his team, if you are sitting beside him?"

"None of your impertinence, sir," said she (but she was pleased all the same). "Boys must not say such things to their grandmothers."

Now the advent of Master Vin was opportune; for Mr. Harris, finding that his sister-in-law had now some one of like mind to talk to, left those two frivolous persons alone, and addressed himself exclusively to his bulky friend from the north. And his discourse took the form of pointing out what were the practical and definite aims that Socialism had to place before itself. As to general principles, all thinking men were agreed. Every one who had remarked the signs of the times knew that the next great movement in modern life must be the emancipation of the wage-slave. The tyranny of the capitalists—worse than any tyranny that existed under the feudal system—must be cribbed and confined: too long had he gorged himself with the fruits of the labours of his fellow-creatures. The most despicable of tyrants, he; not only robbing and plundering the hapless beings at his mercy, but debasing their lives, depriving them of their individualism, of the self-respect which was the birthright of the humblest handicraftsman of the middle ages, and making of them mere machines for the purpose of filling his pockets with useless and inordinate wealth. What was to be done, then?—what were the immediate steps to be taken in order to alter this system of monstrous and abominable plunder. It was all very well to make processions to Père Lachaise, and wave red flags, and wax eloquent over the graves of the Communists; but there was wanted something more than talk, something more than a tribute to the memory of the martyrs, something actual to engage our own efforts, if the poor man was not to be for ever ground to the dust, himself and his starving family, by the relentless plutocrat and his convenient freedom of contract. Let the State, then—that engine of oppression which had been invented by the rich—now see whether it could not do something for all

classes under its care: let it consider the proletariat as well as the unscrupulous landlords and the sordid and selfish bourgeoisie. Already it was working the Telegraphs, the Post-Office, the Parcels Post, the Dockyards, and Savings Banks; and if it regulated the wages it paid by the wage-rate of the outside market, that was because it followed the wicked old system of unequal distribution of profit that was soon to be destroyed. That would speedily be amended. What further, then? The land for the people, first of all. As clear as daylight was the right of the people to the land: let the State assume possession, and manage it—its mines and minerals, its agriculture, its public grounds and parks—for the benefit of all, not for the profit of a pampered few. The State must buy and own the railways, must establish Communal centres of distribution for the purchase and exchange of goods, must establish systems of credit, must break down monopoly everywhere, and the iron power of commercialism that was crushing the life out of the masses of the population. The State must organise production, so that each man shall do his share of work demanded by the community, and no more—

But here Mrs. Ellison, who had doubtless heard or read all this before, turned away altogether. She asked her nephew to give her some more strawberries.

"I say, Vin," she remarked incidentally, "what very beautiful dessert-plates these are. I don't remember them. Where did you get them?"

"I thought you would admire them," said he. "They are my father's own design."

"Really! I call them very handsome—and so quaint and unusual. He must tell me where I can get some of them: when I go back to Brighton I should like to take a few with me for my small establishment."

"But you can't, aunt," he said.

"Why?"

"Because my father had the moulds broken."

She looked at him for a moment and then sniggered—yes, sniggered, but discreetly, so that the two perfervid politicians should not see.

"That is pretty well," she observed in an undertone, "for a Socialist and Communist—to have the moulds broken so that nobody else should have any!"

Presently she said, in the same undertone—

"I am going to catch your eye in a minute, Vin. Are you coming upstairs to the drawing-room with me?"

"Yes, of course, aunt," said he, instantly. "Get up now, and let's be off."

She rose: so did her brother-in-law. Mr. Ogden remained in his chair—perhaps through inattention, or perhaps he was bewildered by the consciousness that he ought to make, as a relic of his ancient worship of *laissez faire*, some protest against this wholesale intervention of the State. Then Vincent opened the door for the tall and bright-eyed young widow; and he and she passed out and went upstairs together.

When they entered the spacious and richly-furnished room, the atmosphere of which was heavy with the scent of flowers, Mrs. Ellison seated herself in a low lounging-chair, while her nephew stood some little way off, his hands behind his back, his eyes absently staring into a rose-shaded lamp as if he could see pictures there. When she spoke, no doubt he heard; but he did not answer or interrupt: he allowed her to ramble on. And she was in a talkative and vivacious mood.

"I am going to the Drawing Room to-morrow, Vin," said she, "to present Louie Drexel; and if you were kind and civil you would come down to St. James's Park and find out our brougham and talk to us while we are waiting. I do so want you to get to know Miss Drexel well; it would be worth your while, I can tell you. You see, those American girls have such excellent good sense. This evening, before you came in, your father was treating us to a dissertation on the iniquity of riches—or rather the absurdity of people revelling in wealth, and at the same time professing to be Christians. He asked—and I'm sure I couldn't answer him—how a Bishop can reconcile his enjoyment of £10,000 a year with Christ's plain injunction, 'Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor.' And while I was listening to the sermon, I was thinking of you, Vin. I don't know how far you have accepted your father's theories—which he himself takes precious good care not to put into practice. But some day—for young men are so impulsive and wilful and uncertain—you might suddenly take it into your head to do some wild thing of that kind; and then don't you see how well it would be for you to be married to a sensible American girl; for if you were to sell all that you have and give to the poor, she would make pretty certain you didn't sell all that she had—so long as the Married Women's Property Act was in force. There's no mad Quixotism about a girl like that—level-headed,

isn't that what they call it over there? Then think what a help such a wife as that would be to you in public life. Think of an election, for example—why, Louie Drexel could talk the voters out of their five senses—bamboozle the women, and laugh the men into good humour. I wonder you didn't pick up one of those bright American girls when you were over in the States: I suppose you were too busy examining the political machine, and the machinists. But I'm glad you didn't; I couldn't trust you; and I'm going to do it for you myself. You are my boy: I'm going to provide for you. And I haven't fixed on Louie Drexel yet; but at the same time you might come down to-morrow to St. James's Park and talk to her."

He withdrew his eyes from the crimson lamp, and came and took a chair near her.

"I am thinking of making a little change in my arrangements," said he. "There is too much distraction here; especially at this time of the year, when everybody's in town. I am going to take rooms elsewhere."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the pretty young widow, with a smile. "Is that it? The restraint of home has been found too much at last—we must have freedom, and wine-parties, and cards? Well, who can wonder at it? I warned your father years ago of the folly of not sending you to college; you would have had all that over by this time, like other young men; but no, the future Champion of the Proletariat was not to have his mind contaminated by the sons of squires. Well, and where have the princely apartments been chosen? In Piccadilly, of course—yellow satin and golden goblets."

"You are quite mistaken, aunt," he said, simply. "The rooms I hope to get to-morrow are in a quiet little street that I dare say you never heard of: if you saw it, you might probably call it slummy."

"Oh, is that it?" she said again, for her brain was nimble and swift in the construction of theories. "Then you are really going to put some of your father's principles into practice, and to consort with the masses? I've often wondered when he was going to begin himself. You know how he declares it to be monstrous that there should be people of your own race, and colour, and religion, whom you would hesitate to ask to sit down at the same table as yourself; but I have not heard him as yet invite Jack the crossing-sweeper or Tom from the stable-yard to come in and dine with him. And if they came in without an invitation, taking him at his word, as it

were, I am afraid their reception wouldn't be warm—yes, it would be remarkably warm—they'd be thrown out of the front-door in a couple of seconds. So you are going slumming, is that it? You want to understand the great heart of the people—before you lead them on to anarchy and universal plunder?"

"Aunt," said he, with a smile, "you mustn't say such things to me; you mustn't pour reactionary poison into my young mind. No; I am going to retire into that quiet little corner of London simply to get on with my books; and as I shan't let anybody know where it is, I can't be disturbed."

"Do you mean to live there altogether?" she asked, glancing quickly at him. "Shall you sleep there?"

"Oh, no. I shall come home here each evening."

"To dinner? But it is no use asking you that; for you never seem to care where you dine, or whether you dine at all. Have you told your father of this scheme?"

"No, not yet," he made answer; and he could say nothing further just then, for at this moment Harland Harris and his guest came upstairs from the dining-room, and Mr. Ogden proceeded to engage the young widow in ponderous conversation.

As good luck would have it, when Vincent went up next morning to the little thoroughfare leading from Park-street, he found exactly the rooms he wanted, and engaged them there and then, paying a fortnight's rent in advance in order to calm the good landlady's mind, for he had not a scrap of luggage with him. The sitting-room was all he really required, to be sure; but he did not wish to be disturbed by having the adjoining bed-room occupied; so he took that too, money not being of much consequence to this young man. And then, when the landlady left, he sate down to look at his new possessions. The apartments must have looked poorly furnished to eyes familiar with the splendour of Grosvenor Place; but at all events they seemed clean. Cheap German lithographs adorned the walls; the fireplace was gay with strips of pink paper. But when he approached the window—which he did stealthily—there was more to interest him: the opposite two windows, behind the balcony filled with flowers, were both open: at any moment a figure might appear there—perhaps looking out absently and vaguely with those beautiful and wistful eyes. Or perchance he might hear the tender strains of the unseen violin? He remained there for some time, rather breathless and nervous, until he recollected that he had come

hither for the purposes of study; and then he thought he would go away down to Grosvenor Place and seek out such books and writing-materials as he might want, and bring them along forthwith.

He went downstairs and was just about to step outside when he caught sight of something across the way which caused him instantly to shrink back and shelter himself within the shadow of the door—his heart beating quickly. He had nearly been face-to-face with the pensive-eyed young girl, for she had come forth from the opposite house, and was waiting for her grandfather to follow. He remained concealed—fearful of being seen, and yet scarcely knowing why. Then, when he heard the door on the other side shut, and when he had allowed them a few seconds' grace, he stepped forth from his hiding, and saw that they were just turning the corner into Park-street.

Why this perturbation that caused his hands to tremble, that caused his eyeballs to throb, as he looked and looked, and yet hardly dared to look? He was doing no harm—he was thinking no harm. These thoroughfares were open to all; the May morning was warm and fine and clear; why should not he take his way to Hyde Park as well as another? Even in furtively watching whither they went—in keeping a certain distance between them and him—there was no sort of sacrilege or outrage. If they had turned and confronted him, they could not have recognised him: it was almost impossible they could have observed the young man who was half concealed by the curtains of the room in Musselburgh House. And yet—yet—there was some kind of tremulous wonder in his being so near her—in his being allowed, without let or hindrance, to gaze upon the long-flowing masses of hair, that caught a sheen of light here and there, and stirred with the stirring of the wind. And then the simple grace and ease of her carriage: she held her head more erect in these quiet thoroughfares; sometimes she turned a little to address the old man, and then her refined and sensitive profile became visible, and also the mysterious charm of the long and drooping lashes. He noticed that she never looked at any passer-by; but she did not seem so sad on this fresh morning; she was talking a good deal—and cheerfully, as he hoped. He wished for more sunlight—that the day might brighten all around her—that the warm airs might be sweet with the blossoms of the opening summer.

For now they were nearing Hyde Park; and away before them stretched the pale blue vistas of atmosphere under the

wide-swaying branches of the maples. They crossed to Grosvenor Gate; they left the dull roar of Park Lane behind them; they passed beneath the trees; and emerged upon the open breadths of verdure, intersected by pale pink roads. Though summer had come prematurely, this was almost an April-like day: there was a south-west wind blowing, and flattening the feathery grasses; there were shafts of misty sunlight striking here and there; while a confusion of clouds, purple and grey and silver, floated heavily through the surcharged sky. The newly-shorn sheep were quite white—for London. A smart young maid-servant idly shoving a perambulator had a glory of spring flowers in her bonnet. The mild air blowing about brought grateful odours—was it from the green-sward all around, or from the more distant masses of hawthorn white and red?

The old man, marching with uplifted head, and sometimes swinging the stick that he carried, was singing aloud in the gaiety of his heart, though Vincent, carefully keeping at a certain distance, could not make out either the words or the air. The young girl, on the other hand, was simply looking at the various objects, animate and inanimate, around her—at the birds picking up straws or shreds of wool for the building of their nests, at the wind shivering through the grey spikelets of the grass, at the ever-changing conformation of the clouds, at the swaying of the branches of the trees; while from time to time there came floating over from Knightsbridge the sound of a military band. No, she did not appear so sad as she had done the day before; and there was something cheerful, too, about her costume—about the simple dress of dark blue-and-white-striped linen and the sailor's hat of cream-white with a dark blue band. Mary, he made sure her name was—Mary Bethune. Only a name to him; nothing more: a strange, indefinable, immeasurable distance lay between them; not for him was it to draw near to her, to breathe the same air with her, to listen to the low tones of her voice, to wait for the uplifting of the mysteriously shaded eyes. And as for fancies become more wildly audacious—what would be the joy of any human being who should be allowed to touch—with trembling fingertips—with reverent and almost reluctant fingertips—the soft splendour of that shining and beautiful hair?

George Bethune and his granddaughter made their way down to the Serpentine, and took their places on a bench there, while the old man proceeded to draw from his pocket a newspaper, which he leisurely began to read. The girl had nothing

to do but sit placidly there and look around her—at the shimmering stretch of water, at the small boys sailing their mimic yachts, at the quacking ducks and yelping dogs, at the ever-rustling and murmuring trees. Vincent Harris had now dared to draw a little nearer; but still he felt that she was worlds and worlds away. How many yards were there between him and her?—not yards at all, but infinities of space! They were strangers to each other; no spoken word was possible between them; they might go through to the end of life with this impalpable barrier for ever dividing them. And yet it seemed a sort of miraculous thing that he was allowed to come so close—that he could almost tell the individual threads of that soft-shining hair. Then, more than once, too, he had caught a glimpse of her raised eyes, as she turned to address her grandfather; and that was a startling and bewildering experience. It was not their mere beauty; though, to be sure, their clear and limpid deeps seemed all the more clear and limpid because of the touch of sun-tan on her complexion; it was rather that they were full of all ineffable things—simplicity, submission, gratitude, affection, and even, as he rejoiced to think, some measure of mild enjoyment. For the moment there was little of that pensive and resigned look that had struck him in the figure standing with bowed head at Lord Musselburgh's table. She appeared to be pleased with the various life around her and its little incidents; she regarded the sailing of the miniature yachts with interest. When a brace of duck went whirring by overhead, she followed their flight until they were lost to view; she watched two small urchins furtively fishing for minnows, with an eye on the distant park-keeper. There was a universal rustling of leaves in the silence; and sometimes, when the wind blew straight across, the music of the military band became more distinct.

How long they remained there, the young man did not know; it was a golden morning, and all too brief. But when at last they did rise to go he was very nearly caught; for instead of returning by the way they had come, they struck westward; and he suddenly saw with alarm that there was no time for him to get behind one of the elms. All he could do was to turn aside, and lower his eyes. They passed within a few yards of him; he could distinctly hear the old man singing, with a fine note of bravado in his voice, "The standard on the braes o' Mar, is up and streaming rarely"; then, when he was sure they were some way off, he made bold to raise his eyes again. Had

she taken any notice of him? He hoped not. He did not wish her to think him a spy; he did not wish to be known to her at all. He should be her constant neighbour, her companion almost, without any consciousness on her part. And again and again he marvelled that the landlady in the little thoroughfare should have given him those treasures of rooms—should have put such happiness within his reach—for so trivial a sum. Seventeen shillings a week!—when each moment would be a diamond, and each evening hour a string of diamonds!

But nevertheless there were his studies to be thought of; so now he walked away down to Grosvenor Place, gathered his books together, and took them up in a hansom to his newly-acquired lodgings. That afternoon he did loyally stick to his work—or tried to do so, though, in fact, his ears were alert for any sound coming from the other side of the way. He had left his window open; one of the windows of the opposite house was also left open. Occasionally he would lay down Draper's Civil War in America, and get up and stretch his legs, and from a convenient shelter send a swift glance of scrutiny across the street. There was no sign. Perhaps they had gone out again, shopping, or visiting, or, as likely as not, to look at the people riding and driving in the Park. He returned to Draper, and to President Jackson's Proclamation—but with less of interest: his annotations became fewer. He was listening as well as reading.

Then all of a sudden there flashed into his brain a suggestion—a suggestion that had little to do with Clay's Compromise, or the project to arrest Mr. Calhoun. On the previous evening it had seemed to him as though the unseen violinist were speaking to him: why, then, should he not answer, in the same language? There could be no offence in that—no impertinence: it would be merely one vague voice responding to the other, the unknown communicating in this fleshless and bloodless way with the unknown. And now he was abundantly grateful to his aunt for having insisted on his including music among his various studies and accomplishments: a use had come for his slight proficiency at last: most modern languages he knew, but he had never expected to be called upon to speak in this one. And yet what more simple, as between neighbours? He was not thrusting his society on any one; he was invading no privacy; he was demanding no concession of friendship or even acquaintance. But at least the dreadful gulf of silence would be bridged over by this mystic means.

It was nearly six o'clock; London was busy when he went out on this hot evening. He walked along to a music-publisher's place in Regent-street; and hired a piano on the express stipulation that it was to be in his rooms within one hour. Then, as he had only had a biscuit for lunch, and wished to leave himself untrammelled later on, he turned into a restaurant, and dined there, simply enough, and had a cigarette and a look at the evening papers. Thereafter he strolled back to his lodgings, and took to his book, though his thoughts were inclined to wander now and again.

Twilight had fallen; but he did not light the gas. Once, for a brief second or two, he had quietly run his fingers over the keys of the piano, to learn if it was tolerably in tune; then the room relapsed into silence again. And was there to be silence on the other side as well? He waited and listened, and waited and listened, in vain. Perhaps, while he was idling away his time in the Regent-street restaurant, they had come out from the house and gone off to some theatre. The street was so still now that he could almost have heard any one speaking in that room on the other side; but there was no sound.

Then his heart leapt and his brain grew giddy. Here was that low-breathing and vibrating wail again:—and was she alone now?—in the gathering darkness. He recognised the air; it was "Auld Robin Gray;" but never before had he known that it was so beautiful and so ineffably sad as well. Slowly she played and simply; it was almost like a human voice; only that the trembling strings had a penetrating note of their own. And when she ceased, it seemed to him that it would be profanation to break in upon the hushed and sacred stillness.

And yet was he not to answer her, in the only speech that could not offend? Was he to act the coward, when there offered a chance of his establishing some subtle link with her, of sending a message, of declaring his presence in this surely unobtrusive fashion? Quickly he sat down to the piano; and, in rather a nervous and anxious fashion, began. He was not a brilliant performer—anything but that; but he had a light touch and a sensitive ear; and he played with feeling and grace. It was "Kathleen Mavourneen"—and a sort of appeal in its way, did she but remember the words. He played the melody over only once, slowly and as sympathetically as he could; then he rose and retired from the piano; and stood in the darkness, listening.

Alas! there was no response. What had he done? He

waited, wondering; but all was still in the little street. It was as if some bird, some mellow-throated thrush or nightingale, had been warbling to itself in the dim security of the leaves, and been suddenly startled and silenced by an alien sound, not knowing what that might portend.

CHAPTER III.

AN APPROACH.

THERE was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called out old George Bethune.

There appeared a middle-aged man, of medium height, who looked like a butler out of employment; he was pale and flabby of face, with nervous eyes expressive of a sort of imbecile amiability.

"Ah, Hobson!" said Mr. Bethune, in his lofty manner. "Well?"

The landlady's husband came forward in the humblest possible fashion; and his big, prominent, vacuous eyes seemed to be asking for a little consideration and goodwill.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, in the most deplorable of Cockney accents, "I 'umbly beg your pardon for making so bold; but knowing as you was so fond of everything Scotch, I took the liberty of bringing you a sample of something very special—a friend of mine, sir, recommended it—and then says I to him, 'Lor bless ye, I don't know nothing about Highland whiskey; but there's a gentleman in our 'ouse who is sure to be a judge, and if I can persuade him to try it, he'll be able to say if it's the real sort.'"

"All right, Hobson," said George Bethune, in his grand way. "Some other time I will see what it is like."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!" said the ex-butler, with earnest gratitude; and he went and placed the bottle on the sideboard. Then he came back, and hesitatingly took out an envelope from his pocket. "And if I might ask another favour, sir. You see, sir, in this 'ot weather people won't go to the theatres; and they're not doing much; and my brother-in-law, the theatrical agent, he's glad to get the places filled up, to make

a show, sir, as you might say. And I've got two dress-circle seats, if you and the young lady was thinking of going to the theatre to-morrow night. It's a great favour, sir, as my brother-in-law said to me as he was a-giving me the tickets and arsking me to get 'em used."

He lied; for there was no brother-in-law and no theatrical agent in the case. He himself had that very afternoon honestly and straightforwardly purchased the tickets at the box-office, as he had done on more than one occasion before, out of the money allowed him for personal expenses by his wife; so that he had to look forward to a severe curtailment of his gin and tobacco for weeks to come.

"Thanks—thanks!" said George Bethune, as he lit his long clay pipe. "I will see what my granddaughter says when she comes in—unless you would like to use the tickets yourself."

"Oh, no, sir, begging your pardon, sir," was the instant rejoinder. "When I 'ave a evening out I go to the Oxbridge music-'all—perhaps it's vanity, sir—but when Charley Coldstream gets a hangcore, I do like to hear some on 'em call out, 'Says Wolseley, says he!' Ah, sir, that was the proudest moment of my life when I see Charley Coldstream come on the stage and begin to sing verse after verse, and the people cheering; and I owed it all to you, sir; it was you, sir, as advised me to send it to him——"

"A catching refrain—a catching refrain," said the old gentleman, encouragingly. "Just fitted to get hold of the public ear."

"Why, sir," said Hobson, with a fatuous little chuckle of delight, "this werry afternoon, as I was coming down Park-street, I 'eard a butcher's boy a-singing it—I did indeed, sir—as clear as could be I 'eard the words,

'Says Wolseley, says he,
To Arabi,

You can fight other chaps, but you can't fight me.'

—every word I 'eard. But would you believe it, sir, when I was in the Oxbridge music-'all I could 'ardly listen, I was so frightened, and my ears a-buzzin, and me 'ardly able to breathe. Lor, sir, that *was* a experience! Nobody looked at me, and that was a mercy—I couldn't ha' stood it. Even the chairman, as was not more than six yards from me, 'e didn't know who I was, and not being acquainted with him, I couldn't offer him something, which I should have considered it a proud honour so to do on sich an occasion. And if I might make so bold, sir——"

He was fumbling in his breast-pocket.

"What—more verses?" said Mr. Bethune, good-naturedly. "Well, let's see them. But take a seat, man, take a seat."

Rather timidly he drew a chair in to the table; and then he said with appealing eyes:

"But wouldn't you allow me, sir, to fetch you a little drop of the whiskey—I assure you it's the best!"

"Oh, very well—very well; but bring two tumblers; single drinking is slow work."

In a few seconds those two curiously-assorted companions—the one massive and strong-built, impressive in manner, measured and emphatic of speech, the other feeble and fawning, at once eager and vacuous, his face ever ready to break into a maudlin smile—were seated in confabulation together, with some sheets of scribbled paper between.

"And if you will excuse my being so bold, sir," continued Hobson, with great humility, "but I 'ave been reading the little volume of Scotch songs you lent me, and—and——"

"Trying your hand at that, too?"

"Only a verse, sir."

Mr. Bethune took up the scrap of paper; and read aloud:

"O leese me on the toddy,
the toddy,
the toddy,
O leese me on the toddy,
We'll hae a willie-waught!"

"Well, yes," he said, with rather a doubtful air, "you've got the phrases all right—except the willie-waught, and that is a common error. To tell you the truth, my friend, there is no such thing as a willie-waught. *Waught* is a hearty drink; a right gude-willie waught is a drink with right good will. *Willie-waught* is nothing—a misconception—a printer's blunder. However, phrases do not count for much. Scotch phrases do not make Scotch song. It is not the provincial dialect—it is the breathing spirit that is the life"—and therewith he repeated, in a proud manner, as if to crush this poor anxious poet by the comparison,

"I see her in the dewy flower,
Sae lovely, sweet, and fair;
I hear her voice in ilka bird
Wi' music charm the air;
There's not a bonnie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green,
Nor yet a bonnie bird that sings
But minds me o' my Jean."

"Beg pardon, sir—Miss Bethune?" said Hobson, enquiringly; for he evidently thought these lines were of the old gentleman's own composition. And then, as he received no answer, for Mr. Bethune had turned to his pipe, he resumed, "Ah, I see, sir, I 'ave not been successful. Too ambitious—too ambitious. It was you yourself, sir, as advised me to write about what I knew; and—and in fact, sir, what I see is that there is nothing like patriotism. Lor, sir, you should see them young fellers at the Oxbridge—they're as brave as lions—especially when they've 'ad a glass. Talk about the French! The French ain't in it, when we've got our spirit up. We can stand a lot, sir, yes, we can; but don't let them push us too far. Not *too* far. It will be a bad day for them when they do. An Englishman ain't given to boasting; but he's a terror when his back's up—and a Scotchman too, sir, I beg your pardon—I did not mean anything—I intended to include the Scotchman too, I assure you, sir. There's a little thing here, sir," he continued modestly, "that I should like to read to you, if I may make so bold. I thought of sending it to Mr. Coldstream—I'm sure it would take—for there's some fight in the Englishman yet—and in the Scotchman too, sir," he instantly added.

"A patriotic poem?—Well?"

Thus encouraged the pleased poet moistened his lips with the whiskey and water he had brought for himself and began—

*"Where's the man would turn and fly?
Where's the man afraid to die?
It isn't you, it isn't I.
No, my lads, no, no!"*

Then his voice had a more valiant ring in it still:

*"Who will lead us to the fray?
Who will sweep the foe away?
Who will win the glorious day?
Of England's chivalry?"*

It is true he said, "Oo will sweep the foe awye?" but these little peculiarities were lost in the fervour of his enthusiasm.

"Roberts—Graham—Buller—Wood—"

He paused after each name as if listening for the thunderous cheering of the imaginary audience.

*"And many another 'most as good:
They're the men to shed their blood
For their country!"*

Then there was a touch of pathos :

"Fare thee well, love, and adieu !"

But that was immediately dismissed :

*"Fiercer thoughts I have than you ;
We will drive the dastard crew
Into slavery !"*

And then he stretched forth his right arm, and declaimed in loud and portentous tones—

*"See the bloody tented-field ;
Look the foe—they yield !—they yield !
Hurrah ! hurrah ! our glory's sealed !
Three cheers for victory !"*

Suddenly his face blanched. For at this moment the door opened : a tall woman appeared—with astonishment and indignation only too legible in her angular features.

"Hobson !" she exclaimed ; and at this awful sound the bold warrior seemed to collapse into a limp rag. "I *am* surprised—I *am indeed* surprised ! Really, sir, how can you encourage him in such impudence ? Seated at your own table and drinking too, I declare," she went on, as she lifted up the deserted tumbler—for her bellicose husband had hastily picked up his MSS. and vanished from the room. "Really, sir, such familiarity !"

"In the republic of letters, my good Mrs. Hobson," said Mr. Bethune with a smile, "all men are equal. I have been much interested in some of your husband's writings."

"Oh, sir, don't put sich things in his 'ead !" she said, as she proceeded to lay the cloth for dinner. "He's a fool, and that's bad enough ; but if so be as you put things in his 'ead, and he giving of hisself airs, it'll be hawful ! What good he is to anybody, I don't know. He won't clean a winder or black a boot even."

"How can you expect it ?" George Bethune said, in perfect good humour. "Manual labour would be a degradation. Men of genius ought to be supported by the State."

"In the workus, I suppose," she said, sharply—but here Maisrie Bethune came upstairs and into the room, carrying some parcels in her hand, and instantly the landlady's face changed its expression, and became as amiable and smiling as the gaunt features would allow.

At dinner the old man told his granddaughter that he had procured (he did not say how) places at the —— Theatre for the following evening, and seemed to be pleased about this little break in their quiet lives.

"But why did you go to such expense, grandfather?" Maisrie said. "You know I am quite happy enough in spending the evening at home with you. And every day now I ask myself when I am to begin copying the poems—for the volume, you know. You have sent for them to America, haven't you? But really you have such a wonderful memory, grandfather, I believe you could repeat them all—and I could write them down—and let the printers have them. I was so glad when you let me help you with the book you published in Montreal; and you know my writing is clear enough; you remember what the foreman printer said? Don't you think we could begin to-night, grandfather? It pleases you to repeat those beautiful verses—you are so fond of them—and proud of them because they are written by Scotchmen—and I am sure it would be a delight to me to write them out for you."

"Oh, yes, yes," he said, fretfully, "but not to-night. You're always in such a hurry, Maisrie." And then he added, in a gentler way, "Well, it is a wonderful blessing, a good memory. I never want for a companion, when I've a Scotch air or a Scotch song humming through my brain. On the darkest and wettest day, here in this big city, what have you to do but think of

‘The broom, the yellow, yellow broom,
The broom o’ the Cowdenknowes,’

and at once you have before you golden banks, and meadows, and June skies, and all else is forgotten. Indeed, lass, Scotland has become for me such a storehouse of beautiful things—in imagination—that I am almost afraid to return to it, in case the reality might disappoint me. No, no, it could not disappoint me: I treasure every inch of the sacred soil: but sometimes I wonder if you will recognise the magic and witchery of hill and glen. As for me, there is naught else I fear now; there are no human ties I shall have to take up again; I shall not have to mourn the ‘Bourocks o’ Bargeny.’”

"What is that, grandfather?"

"If you had been brought up in Scotland, Maisrie, you would know what the bigging o’ bourocks is among children—play-houses in the sand. But sometimes the word is applied to

huts or cottages, as it is in the title of Hugh Ainslie's poem. That poem is one that I shall be proud to give a place to in my collection," he continued, with an air of importance. "Hugh Ainslie is no more with us; but his countrymen, whether in America or at home, are not likely to forget the 'Bourocks o' Bargeny.'"

"Can you remember it, grandfather?"

"Can I not?" said he; and therewith he repeated the lines, never faltering once for a phrase—

"I left ye, Jeanie, blooming fair
'Mang the bourocks o' Bargeny;
I've found ye on the banks o' Ayr,
But sair ye're altered, Jeanie.
I left ye like the wanton lamb
That plays 'mang Hadyed's heather;
I've found ye noo a sober dame—
A wife and eke a mither.

I left ye 'mang the leaves sae green
In rustic weed befittin';
I've found ye buskit like a queen,
In painted chaumer sittin'.
Ye're fairer, statelier, I can see,
Ye're wiser, nae doubt, Jeanie;
But oh! I'd rather met wi' thee,
'Mang the bourocks of Bargeny!"

"It's very sad, grandfather," she said, wistfully.

"The way of the world—the way of the world," said he; and observing that she had finished and was waiting for him, he forthwith rose and went to the mantelpiece for his pipe. "There's many a true story of that kind. Well, Maisrie, you'll just get your violin, and we'll have the 'Broom o' the Cowdenknowes?'" And while she went to fetch the violin, and as he cut his tobacco, he sang in a quavering voice—

"O the broom, the bonnie, bonnie broom,
The broom o' the Cowdenknowes,
I wish I were at hame again
Where the broom sae sweetly grows!"

And then he went to the window, to smoke his pipe in peace and quiet, while Maisrie, seated further back in the shadow of the room, played for him the well-known air. Did she guess—and fear—that she might have an audience of more than one? At all events her doubts were soon resolved: when she had

ceased, and after a second or so of silence, there came another sound into the prevailing hush—it was one of the Songs without Words, and it was being played with considerable delicacy and charm.

“Hallo,” said Mr. Bethune, when he heard the first low-rippling notes, “have we a musical neighbour now?”

“Yes, grandfather,” Maisrie replied, rather timidly. “Last night, when you were out, some one played.”

“Ah, a music-mistress, I dare say. Poor thing—perhaps all alone—and wishing to be friendly in this sort of fashion.”

They listened without further speech until the last notes had gradually died away.

“Now, Maisrie, it is your turn!”

“Oh, no, grandfather!” she said, hastily.

“Why not?”

“It would be like answering—to a stranger.”

“And are we not all strangers?” he said, gently. “I think it is a very pretty idea, if that is what is meant. We’ll soon see. Come, Maisrie; something more than the plashing of a southern fountain—something with northern fire in it. Why not ‘Helen of Kirkconnell’?”

The girl was very obedient; she took up her violin; and presently she was playing that strangely simple air that nevertheless is about as proud and passionate and piteous as the tragic story to which it is wedded. Perhaps the stranger over there did not know the ballad; but George Bethune knew it only too well; and his voice almost broke into a sob as he said, when she had finished—

“Ah, Maisrie, it was no music-master taught you that; it was born in your nature. Sometimes I wonder if a capacity for intense sympathy means an equal capacity for suffering; it is sad if it should be so; a thick skin would be wholesomer—as far as I have seen the world; and few have seen more of it. Well, what has our neighbour to say?”

Their unseen companion on the other side of the little thoroughfare responded with a waltz of Chopin’s—a mysterious, elusive sort of a thing, that seemed to fade away into the dark rather than to cease. Maisrie appeared disinclined to continue this *do ut des* programme; but her grandfather overruled her; and named the airs for her to play, one by one, in alternation with those coming from the open window opposite. At last she said she was tired. It was time for the gas to be lit, and the hot water brought up for her grandfather’s toddy. So she closed

the window and pulled down the blind; lit up the room; rang the bell for the hot water; and then placidly sate down to her knitting, whilst her grandfather, brewing himself an unmistakable gude-willie waught, and lighting another pipe, proceeded to entertain her with a rambling disquisition upon the world at large, but especially upon his own travels and experiences therein, his philosophical theories, and his reminiscences of the Scotch countryside ballads of his youth.

That mystic and enigmatic conversation with their neighbour over the way was not continued on the following evening, for the old man and his granddaughter went to the theatre; but on the next night again it was resumed; and thereafter, on almost every evening, the two windows replied to each other, as the twilight deepened into dusk. And Maisrie was less reluctant now—she almost took this little concert *à deux* as a matter of course. For one thing, the stranger, whoever he or she might be, did not seem in any way anxious to push the acquaintance any further; no one ever appeared at that open window; nor had she ever encountered any one coming out as she stood on the doorstep waiting for her grandfather. As for him, he still maintained that the new occupant of those rooms must be a woman—perhaps some shy creature, willing to think that she had friendly neighbours, and yet afraid to show herself. Besides, the music that came in response to Maisrie's Scotch airs was hardly what a man would have chosen. The stranger over there seemed chiefly fond of Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Mozart; though occasionally there was an excursion into the *Volkslieder* domain—"Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz," "*Es ritten drei Reiter zum Thore hinaus*," "*Von meinem Bergli muss i scheiden*," or something of that kind; whereas, if it had been a man who occupied those rooms, surely they would have heard—during the day, for example—a fine bold ditty like "Simon the Cellarer," "The Bay of Biscay," or "The Friar of Orders Gray," with a strident voice outroaring the accompaniment? Maisrie answered nothing to these arguments; but in spite of herself, when she had to cross the room for something or other, her eyes would seek that mysteriously vacant window, with however rapid and circumspect a glance. And always in vain. Moreover, the piano was never touched during the day: the stranger invariably waited for the twilight before seeking to resume that subtle link of communication.

Of course this state of things could not go on for ever—unless the person over there possessed the gift of invisibility. One

morning as Maisrie and her grandfather were going out as usual for a stroll in the Park, she went downstairs first, and along the lobby, and opened the door, to wait for him. At the very same instant the door opposite was opened, and there, suddenly presented to her view, was a young man. He was looking straight across; she was looking straight across; their eyes met without the slightest chance of equivocation or denial; and each knew that this was recognition. They regarded each other but for a swift second; but as plainly as possible he had said to her "Do you guess? Are you angry? No, do not be angry!"—and then his glance was averted; he shut the door behind him; and slowly proceeded on his way. Was she surprised? No. Perhaps she was startled by the unexpectedness of the meeting; perhaps her heart was beating a little more quickly than usual; but a profound instinct had already told her that it was no woman who had spoken to her in those dusky twilights, evening after evening. A woman would not have wrapped herself up in that mysterious secrecy. A woman who wished to make friends with her neighbours over the way would have come to the window, would have smiled, would have made some excuse for calling. Maisrie did not ostensibly look after the young man—but she could see him all the same, until he turned the corner. She was vaguely troubled. The brief glance she had met had in it a kind of appeal. And she wished to say in return that she was not offended; that, being strangers, they must remain strangers; but that she had not taken his boldness ill. She wished to say—she did not know what. Then her grandfather came down; and they went away together; but she uttered not a syllable as to what had just occurred. It was all a bewilderment to her—that left her a little breathless when she tried to think of it.

That night, when the customary time arrived, she refused to take up her violin; and when her grandfather remonstrated, she had no definite excuse. She hesitated and stammered—said they had not played chess for ever so long—or would he rather have a game of draughts?—anything but the violin.

"Are you forgetting your good-natured neighbour over there?" her grandfather asked. "It will be quite a disappointment for her. Poor thing, it appears to be the only society she has; we never hear a sound otherwise; there seems to be no one ever come to talk to her during the day, or we should hear a voice now and again."

"Yes, but, grandfather," said Maisrie, who seemed much embarrassed, "don't you think it a little imprudent to—to

encourage this kind of—of answering each other—without knowing who the other person is?”

“Why, what can be more harmless!” he protested, cheerfully, and then he went on: “More harmless than music?—nothing, nothing! Song is the solace of human life; in joy it is the natural expression of our happiness—in times of trouble it refreshes the heart with thoughts of other and brighter days. A light heart—a heart that can sing to itself—that is the thing to carry you through life, Maisrie!” And he himself, as he crossed the room to fetch a box of matches, was trolling gaily, with a fine bravura execution—

“The boat rocks at the pier o’ Leith,
Fu’ loud the wind blows frae the ferry;
The ship rides by the Berwick Law,
And I maun leave my bonnie Mary.”

Maisrie was not to be moved; but she appeared down-hearted a little. As time went on the silence in the little street seemed somehow to accuse her; she knew she was responsible. She was playing draughts with her grandfather, in a perfunctory sort of way. She remembered that glance of appeal—she could not forget it—and this had been her answer. Then all of a sudden her hand that hovered over the board trembled, and she had almost dropped the piece that was in her fingers: for there had sprung into the stillness a half-hushed sound—it was an air she knew well enough—she could almost recognise the words—

“*Nachtigall, ich hör’ dich singen;
S’Herz thut mir im Leibe springen,
Komm nur bald und sag mir’s wohl,
Wie ich mich verhalten soll.*”

Her grandfather stopped the game to listen; and when the soft-toned melody had ceased, he said—

“There, now, Maisrie, that is an invitation: you must answer.”

“No, no, grandfather,” she said, almost in distress. “I would rather not—you don’t know—you must find out something about—about whoever it is that plays. I am sure it will be better. Of course it is quite harmless, as you say—oh, yes, quite harmless—but I should like you to get to know first—quite harmless, of course—but I am frightened—about a stranger—not frightened, of course—but—don’t ask me, grandfather!”

Well, it was not of much concern to him; and as he was winning all along the line, he willingly returned to the game. It had grown so dark, however, that Maisrie had to go and light the gas—having drawn down the blinds first, as was her invariable habit. When she came back to the table she seemed to breathe more freely; though she was thoughtful and pre-occupied—not with the game. The music on the other side of the way was not resumed that evening, as far as they could hear.

Several days passed; and each evening now was silent. Maisrie saw nothing more of the young man; indeed, she studiously refrained from glancing across to the other side of the street—except when she was going out, and wanted to make sure there was no one there. But something was now about to happen that entirely altered this disposition of affairs.

One morning George Bethune and his granddaughter had gone for their accustomed stroll in Hyde Park, and in course of time had taken their places on a bench near the Serpentine, while the old man had pulled out a newspaper and began to read it. The day was sultry, despite an occasional stirring of wind; and Maisrie sitting there, and having nothing to do but look at the water, and the trees, and the sky, observed that all the world around them was gradually growing darker. In the south, especially, the heavens were of a curious metallic hue—a livid grey, as it were; while across that hung two horizontal belts of deepest purple that remained motionless, while other and lighter tags of vapour were inter-twisting with each other or melting away into nothingness. Those two clouds were not of the usual cloud-form at all—they were rather like two enormous torpedoes lying one above the other; and there was a sombre deadness of hue about them that looked ominous. Suddenly, as she was thus vaguely regarding those long purple swathes, there ran across them—springing vertically upwards—a quivering line of yellow flame—so thin it was, it appeared like a thread of golden wire—and when that had vanished, there was a second or two of silence, followed by a dull, low, rumbling noise that seemed to come from a considerable distance. She was not much alarmed. There were no signs of a terrific thunderstorm; probably a few more flashes would serve to loosen and disperse those lowering clouds, and allow the day to clear.

It was at this moment that a young man came up and ad-

dressed Mr. Bethune—with a certain courteous hesitation, and yet in frank and ingenuous tones.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "but may I claim the privilege of a neighbour to offer you this umbrella—I'm afraid there's a shower coming—and the young lady may get wet."

It was a pleasant voice; George Bethune looked up well-disposed towards the stranger, whoever he might be. And the face of the young man was also prepossessing; it was something more than handsome; it was intelligent and refined; and the honest and straightforward eyes had a certain confidence in them, as if they were not used to having their friendly advances repulsed.

"I thank you—I thank you," said George Bethune, with much dignity. "I had not observed. But you will want the umbrella for yourself—we can get shelter under one of the trees."

"Would that be wise, sir, in a thunderstorm?" said the young man. "Oh, no, let me give you the umbrella—I don't mind a shower—and it won't be more than that, I fancy."

George Bethune accepted the proffered courtesy.

"Here, Maisrie, since this young gentleman is so kind; you'd better be prepared. A neighbour did you say, sir?" he continued.

"A very near neighbour," answered the young man, with a smile, and he seated himself by the side of Mr. Bethune without more ado. "I have often thought of speaking to you, and asking to be allowed to make your acquaintance; for you seem to have very few visitors—you will pardon my curiosity—while I have none at all."

"Oh, really, really," the old man said, somewhat vaguely; perhaps he was wondering how so faultlessly attired a young gentleman (his patent-leather boots, for example, were of the most approved pattern) should have chosen lodgings in so humble a thoroughfare.

"It is a very quiet little corner, is it not?" the young man said—almost as if answering that unspoken question. "That is why it suits me so well; I can get on with my books without interruption. The street is so small that it isn't worth an organ-grinder's while to waste time in it."

"Music is a sad thing for interrupting study; I know that," the old gentleman observed. "By the way, I hope we do not disturb you—my granddaughter plays the violin sometimes—"

"I could listen to that kind of music all day long," was the

response. "I never heard such violin-playing—most beautiful! —most beautiful!"

"Then you are not far away from us?"

"Right opposite," was the straightforward answer.

George Bethune glanced at the young man with a look of quiet amusement; he was thinking of the pale music-mistress—the solitary widow of his imagination.

"And you—you also play a little in the evenings sometimes?"

"I hope you didn't think it rude, sir," the young man said, humbly. "I thought it permissible as between neighbours."

"Oh, they were pretty little concerts," said George Bethune, good-naturedly. "Very pretty little concerts. I don't know why they were stopped. I suppose Maisrie had some fancy about them—my granddaughter Maisrie——"

It was a kind of introduction. The young man, modestly veiling the quick flash of delight in his eyes at this unexpected happiness, respectfully bowed. Maisrie, with her beautiful pale face suffused with unusual colour, made some brief inclination also; then she seemed to retire again from this conversation—though she could not but overhear.

"My name is Harris," the young man said, as though these confidences were all as a matter of course between neighbours. "It isn't a very distinguished name; but one has to take what is given one. It is not of much consequence."

"I am not so sure about that," the older man rejoined, somewhat sententiously. "A good name is a good thing; it is an honour not to be purchased. It may be the only one of your possessions remaining to you; but of that they cannot rob you."

"Oh, of course, of course," Vincent said, quickly, for he perceived the mistake he had made. "An old historic name is certainly something to be proud of. By the way, sir, did your family originally take their name from Bethon on the Sarthe or from Bethune in the Department of Calais?"

"Bethune—Bethune," said the old man, who appeared to be pleased by this question, which spoke of previous enquiries; and then he added, with a lofty air: "The Duc de Sully, Marquis de Rosny, Sovereign Prince of Enrichemont and Boisbel, Grand Master of the Artillery and Marshal of France, was Maximilien de Bethune—Maximilien de Bethune."

"Oh, really," said the young man, who seemed much impressed.

"The name," continued old George Bethune, in the same oracular vein, "was often spelt Beaton and Beton—especially in Scotland—as everybody knows. Whether James, Archbishop of Glasgow, and his nephew David, Archbishop of St. Andrews, had any immediate relationship with France—beyond that David was consecrated Bishop of Mirepoix when he was negotiating the marriage of James V. at the French Court—I cannot at the moment precisely say; but of this there can be no doubt, that from Bethune in the north came the original territorial designation of the family, not from Bethon in the west. Maximilien de Bethune—Bethune in the Department of the Straits of Calais."

"Oh, really," the young man said again, quite humbly.

Now by this time it had become manifest that there was to be no thunderstorm at all. There had been a few more of those quivering strokes of yellow fire (that dwelt longer on the retina than in the clouds) accompanied by some distant mutterings and rumblings; and at one point it seemed as if the dreaded shower were coming on; but all passed off gradually and quietly; the sky slowly brightened; a pale sunshine began here and there to touch the greensward and the shivering elms. This young man had no excuse for remaining here; but he seemed to forget; he was so busy talking—and talking in a very pleased and half-excited fashion, with an occasional glance across at the young lady.

"Grandfather," said Maisrie Bethune, presently, handing him the umbrella as a sort of hint.

But even when Vincent received his property back, he appeared to take no heed. He had observed that the newspaper lying on the old man's knee was the *Toronto Globe*; he drew attention to the circumstance; and now all his conversation was of Queen's Park, Lake Ontario, of King Street, Queen Street, Church Street, of the Exhibition Grounds, of Park Island, and Block House Bay, and the Royal Canadian Yacht Club. So he had been there too? Oh, yes, he had been all over Canada and America. He was as familiar with Idaho as with Brooklyn. He had fished in the Adirondacks and shot mountain sheep in the Rockies.

"You have been to Omaha, then?" the old man asked.

"Oh, yes, of course."

"For my granddaughter here," he continued, with a smile, "is an Omaha girl."

"Oh, indeed," said Vincent, rather breathlessly, and again

he ventured to look across to Maisrie Bethune and her down-cast eyes.

"Yes, but only by the accident of birth," said George Bethune, instantly, as if he must needs guard against any misapprehension. "Every drop of blood in her veins is Scotch—and of a right good quality too. Well, you have heard—you have heard. Do you think any one could understand those old Scotch airs who was not herself Scotch in heart and soul?"

"I never heard anything so beautiful," the young man answered, in an undertone; indeed, he seemed hardly capable of talking about her, any more than he could fix his eyes steadily on her face. His forced glances were timorous and fugitive. There was something sacred—that kept him at a distance. It was enough to be conscious that she was there; his only prayer was that she should remain; that he and she should be together, if a little way apart, looking at the same skies and water and trees, breathing the same air, hearkening to the same sounds. So he kept on talking to the old man, in rather a nervous and eager fashion, fearful all the time that either of them should propose to go.

And thus it came about that Vincent Harris seemed to have a good deal to say for himself; he appeared to forget that he was speaking to two strangers; rather he was chatting with two neighbours, whom he wished to be his friends. And the old man, in his self-sufficient and dignified way, was quite content to encourage this new acquaintance. His conversation was something to pass the time withal; he was modest, well-mannered, intelligent; there was an air of distinction about him that showed good up-bringing as well as some decision of character. No doubt he was of a wealthy family, or he could not have spent so much of his time in travel; by accident he had mentioned one or two well-known people as though he were in the habit of familiarly meeting with them; from some passing hint as to the nature of his studies, Mr. Bethune gathered that this pleasant-spoken, pleasant-smiling neighbour was destined for a public career. There was even something interesting, to one who had grown old and callous of the world's shows, in noting the bright enthusiasm of the young man, the clear light in his eyes, the general air of strength and ease and courage that sate lightly on him, as befitting one who was in the very May-morn of his youth.

But at last, for shame's sake, Vincent had himself to rise

and break up this all too-attractive companionship. He said, with great humility:

"I am sure I ought to apologise to Miss Bethune for having taken up so much of your time. Rather an unwarrantable intrusion; but I don't think there is any chance of the rain coming now—and—and—so I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye—glad to have made your acquaintance," said old George Bethune, with a grave courtesy.

And Maisrie made him a little bow—for he was looking at her rather supplicatingly—as he raised his hat and withdrew. Their eyes had met once more: she could not well have avoided that. And of course she saw him as he walked away southward, across the bridge, until he disappeared.

"A very agreeable young man, that," said Mr. Bethune, with decision, as he rose to his feet and intimated to his granddaughter that they had better set forth again. "Frank in manner, gentle, courteous, intelligent, too—very different from most of the young men of the day."

His granddaughter was silent as she walked by his side.

"What—don't you think so, Maisrie?" he said, with a touch of impatience, for he was used to her assent.

"I think," she answered, a little proudly, "that he showed a good deal of confidence in coming to speak to you without knowing you; and as for his playing those airs in the evening, and in such a way—well, I don't like to use the word impertinence—but still——"

He was surprised; perhaps a trifle vexed.

"Impertinence? Nonsense! Nonsense! Frankness and neighbourliness—that was all; no intrusion, none: a more modest young man I have never met. And as for his coming up to speak to me, why, bless my life, that merely shows the humanizing effects of travel. It is like people meeting at a table d'hôte; and what is the world but a big table d'hôte, where you speak with your neighbour for a little while, and go your way, and forget him? Confidence?—impertinence?—nonsense! He was natural, unaffected, outspoken, as a young man should be: in fact, I found myself on such friendly terms with him that I forgot to thank him for the little service he did us—did you, I should say. Bashfulness, Maisrie," he continued, in his more sententious manner, "bashfulness and stiffness are among the worst characteristics of the untravelled and untaught. Who are we—whatever may be our lineage and

pride of birth—that we should fence ourselves round with a palisade of suspicion or disdain?”

And thus he went on; but he met with no response. And he did not like it; he grew all the more emphatic about this young man; and even hinted that women were curiously perverse creatures, who evinced no toleration, or sympathy, or good nature in their judgment of their fellow beings. What was her objection? To his appearance?—he was remarkably good-looking, and refined in aspect, without a trace of effeminacy. To his manner?—he was almost humble in his anxiety to please. To his talk?—but he had shown himself most bright, good-humoured, alert, and well-informed.

“He had no right to come up and speak to you, grandfather,” was all she would say, and that with a quite unusual firmness.

In the evening, after dinner, when the time came at which Maisrie was accustomed to take up her violin, there was obviously a little embarrassment. But George Bethune tried to break through that by a forced display of geniality.

“Come now, Maisrie,” said he, in a gay fashion, “our neighbour over the way was straightforward enough to come up and offer us his hand; and we must return the compliment. One good turn deserves another. Get your violin, and play something: he will understand.”

“Grandfather, how can you ask me?” she said, almost indignantly; and there was that in the tone of her voice that forbade him to press her further.

But perhaps the universal stillness that prevailed thereafter conveyed some kind of reproach to her; or perhaps her heart softened a little; at all events she presently said, in rather a low voice, and with a diffident manner—

“Grandfather, if you—if you really think the young gentleman wished to be kind and obliging—and—and if you would like to show him some little politeness in return—couldn’t you step across the way—and—and see him, and talk to him for a few minutes? Perhaps he would be glad of that, if he is quite alone.”

“A capital idea, Maisrie,” the old man said, rising at once. “A capital idea.” And then he added, with an air of lofty complacency and condescension, as he selected a couple of volumes from a heap of books on the sideboard: “Perhaps I might as well take over the *Mémoires* with me; it is not at all unlikely he may wish to know something further about

Maximilien de Bethune. I am not surprised—not at all surprised—that a young man called Harris should perceive that there is something in the grandeur of an old historical name.”

CHAPTER IV.

STALLED OX AND A DINNER OF HERBS.

BUT on this particular evening, as it happened, Vincent had promised to dine at home; for his aunt was returning to Brighton on the following day; and there was to be a little farewell banquet given in her honour. Of course aunt and nephew sate together; Mrs. Ellison had arranged that; knowing that at these semi-political dinner-parties the company was frequently a trifle mixed, she took care that on one side at least she should have a pleasant neighbour. And indeed when the guests had taken their places—there were about thirty in all—the table presented a pretty sight. From end to end it was a mass of flowers; at intervals there were pyramids of ice, draped with roses, blush-red and yellow; but the candles in the tall candelabra were not lit—the softly-tinted globes of the electric light shed a sufficient and diffused lustre. It was a sumptuous entertainment; and yet there prevailed an air of elegance and refinement. When soup was served, it was not the aldermanic turtle, but a clear golden fluid with gems of crimson and green; and it was handed round in silver dishes. No one thought of a thick soup on this hot June night.

As soon as the hum of conversation became general, the tall and handsome young widow turned to her companion—who was only a year or two her junior, by the way—and with her demure and mischievous eyes grown full of meaning she said—

“Vin, what has happened to you to-day?”

“What do you mean, aunt?” he answered, with some surprise.

“Something has happened to you to-day,” she went on, confidently. “You can’t hoodwink me. Why have you been so radiant, so complaisant, this afternoon—why are you here, for example—when you haven’t shown up at this dinner-table for weeks past?”

"And you going away to-morrow, aunt!" he exclaimed.

"No use, Vin. All of a sudden you want to be magnanimous to the whole human race; your amiability becomes almost burdensome; your eyes are full of pride and joy; and you think you can hide the transformation from me! Well, then, I will tell you, since you won't tell me: to-day you were introduced to her."

He was startled—and no wonder: had his aunt, by some extraordinary chance, witnessed that interview in Hyde Park? Mrs. Ellison's shrewd, quick eyes noticed his alarm, and laughed.

"The story is as clear as noonday," she continued, in the same undertone. "You come home every night between nine and ten. Why? Because she is an actress, playing in the first piece only; and of course the theatre loses its attraction for you the moment she has left. Now, my dear Vin, that is not the kind of thing for you at all! You'd better stop it—even although you have experienced the wild joy of being introduced to her. What do you know about her? You have been investing her with all the charming qualities of her stage heroines; you haven't learnt yet that she is a little slatternly in her dress, that her tastes in eating and drinking are rather coarse, that her tastes in literature and art aren't any—worse still, that she is already provided with a husband, a loungeur about Strand public-houses, only too ready to accept your patronage and the price of a glass of gin——"

He was immensely relieved.

"Oh, you're all wrong, aunt!" he said, cheerfully. "I haven't been inside a theatre for six months!"

"You haven't?" she said, glancing at him with a kind of amused suspicion. "You are really playing the good boy with Parliamentary reports and blue books? A very admirable diligence. Other young men would be strolling in the park, in this hot weather." And then all of a sudden she asked: "What subject were you studying to-day, Vin?"

"Thompson's Distribution of Wealth," he made answer, with equal promptitude.

"Oh. What does he say?"

"You don't want to know, aunt!"

"Yes, I do: I'm used to hearing all sorts of theories at this table—though I seldom see them put in practice."

Well, he on his side was glad enough to get away from that other and dangerous topic; and whether or not he believed in

her innocent desire for knowledge, he began to discourse on the possibility of universal human happiness being reached by a voluntary equality in the distribution of the products of labour.

"Voluntary, do you see, aunt?—that is the very essence of the scheme," he rambled on, while she appeared to be listening gravely. "Thompson will have nothing to do with force; he himself points out that if you once bring in force to redress the inequalities of wealth, you leave it open for every succeeding majority to employ the same means, so that industry would be annihilated: the capitalists would not lend, the workers would not work. No, it is all to be done by mutual consent. Those who have wealth at present are not to be disturbed; what they have amassed is but a trifle compared with what the millions can produce; and it is this product of universal co-operation that is to constitute the real wealth of the world. Well, I suppose it is only a dream," he proceeded. "On the other hand, take my father's way of looking at it. He is all for State interference; the State is to appropriate everything and manage everything; and to keep on managing it, I suppose, or else things would revert to their former condition. That's where the trouble comes in, of course. The moment you allow anything like freedom of contract, how can you prevent the former condition of affairs coming into existence again? You know, after all, aunt, there is generally a reason for the institutions and social arrangements of any country; they don't spring out of nothing; they grow, and their growth is a necessity——"

"Vincent Harris," said the young widow, solemnly, "I perceive the seeds of a rabid Toryism beginning to sprout in your young mind. Wouldn't your father say that the reason for the monstrous condition of affairs now existing—I don't consider them monstrous; not I; I'm pretty well content, thank you—but wouldn't he say the reason was simply the ignorance of the people who produce and the unscrupulous greed of the other people who take the lion's share of the profits? Of course he would; and so he wants to educate the producer; and protect him by the State; and see that he isn't swindled. Go to; thou art Didymus, and an unbeliever; I suspect Lord Musselburgh has been corrupting you. Tell me," she said, irrelevantly, "who is the woman with the black curls—I did not catch her name when she was introduced to me——"

He was delighted that she showed no sign of returning to that awkward topic.

"Goodness gracious me, aunt," said he, glancing in the direction indicated, where sat an elderly lady, thin and gaunt and pale, with large lustrous black eyes, and black hair done up in the fashion of a generation ago, "do you mean to say you don't know Madame Mikucsek?"

"Who is Madame—What-is-it?"

"You never even heard of her!" he exclaimed, in affected astonishment. "Madame Mikucsek—the discoverer of the Mystery of the East—the Prophetess of the New Religion—who has her followers and disciples all over the world—from Syria to the Himalayas—from New York to Sacramento. Really, aunt, you surprise me: you will be saying next you never heard of *Bô*."

"What is *Bô*—or who is he?" she demanded, impatiently.

"*Bô*," he repeated, as if he were too puzzled by her appalling ignorance to be able to explain, "why, *Bô*—*Bô* is the equivalent of the Chinese *Tá*. It is the principle of life; it is the beginning and the end of all things; it is the condition of the soul—and yet not quite the condition of the soul, for the soul can live outside *Bô* until the miracle of initiation happens. Then the soul is received into *Bô*, and finds that the present is non-existent, and that only the past and the future exist, the future being really the past, when once the soul has entered *Bô*——"

"Vin, I believe you are making a fool of me," the pretty Mrs. Ellison said, severely.

"Oh, I assure you, aunt," he said, with eyes innocent of guile, "it is the great discovery of the age—the great discovery of all time—the Sacred—the Ineffable. When you enter into *Bô* you lose your individuality—or rather, you never had any individuality—for individuality was a confusion of thought, a product of the present, and the present, as I have explained to you, my dear aunt, ceases to exist when you have entered *Bô*. Did I tell you that *Bô* is sentient? Yes, but yet not a being; though there are manifestations, mysterious and ecstatic; and the disciples write to each other on the first day of each month, and tell each other what trances they have been in, and what spiritual joy they have received. These reports are sent to Madame Mikucsek; and they are published in a journal that circulates among the initiated; but the phraseology is hieratic, the outside world could make nothing of it. As for her, she is not expected to reveal anything—what she experiences transcends human speech, and even human thought——"

"I saw the woman mopping up gravy with a piece of bread," said Mrs. Ellison, with frowning eyebrows.

"*Bô*," continued the young man, very seriously, "as far as I have been able to make it out, consists of a vast sphere; elliptical, however: the zenith containing all human aspiration, the base consisting of forgotten evil. When you once enter this magic circle, you are lost, you are transformed, you are here and yet not here; to be does not signify to be but not to be; and not to be is the highest good except not to have been. *Bô*, when once you have received the consecration, and bathed in the light, and perceived the altitudes and the essential deeps and cognisances——"

"Ought to be written Bosh," said she, briefly. "I will not hear any more of that nonsense. And I believe you are only humbugging me: Madame What's-her-name looks more like the widow of a French Communist. Now listen to me, Vin, for I am going away to-morrow. I am glad I was mistaken about the actress; but take care; don't get into scrapes. I shan't be happy till I see you married. Ordinarily a man should not marry until he is thirty or five-and-thirty—if he is five-and-forty so much the better—but even at five-and-thirty, he may have acquired a little judgment; he may be able to tell how much honesty there is in the extreme amiability and unselfishness and simplicity that a young woman can assume, or whether she is likely to turn out an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, and sulking brute. Oh, you needn't laugh: it's no laughing matter, as you'll find out, my young friend. But you—you are different; you are no schoolboy; you've seen the world—too much of it, for you've learnt disrespect for your elders, and try to bamboozle them with accounts of sham systems of philosophy or religion or whatever it is. I say you ought to marry young; but not an elderly woman, as many a young man does, for money or position. Good gracious, no! You'll have plenty of money; your father isn't just yet going to sell this silver dinner-service—which I detest, for it always looks more greasy than china, and besides you feel as if you were scoring it with the edge of your knife all the time—I say he isn't going to sell his silver and distribute unto the poor *just yet*. As for position, you've got to make that for yourself: would you owe it to your wife? Very well," proceeded his pretty monitress, in her easy and prattling fashion; "come down to Brighton for a week or two. I will ask the Drexel girls; you will have them all to yourself, to pick and choose from, but Louie is my favourite.

You have no idea how delightful Brighton is in June—the inland drives are perfect, so cool and shaded with trees, when you know where to go, that is. If you come down I'll make up a party and take you all to Ascot: Mrs. Bourke has offered me her house for the week—isn't that good-natured, when she could easily have let it?—and I have to telegraph yes or no to-morrow. I hadn't intended going myself; but if you say you will come down, I will accept; and I know I can get the Drexel girls."

"It is so kind of you, aunt; so very kind," he said; "but I really can't get away. You know I don't care much about racing——"

"But Louie Drexel isn't racing."

"I'm very sorry, but you must excuse me, aunt," he said contritely.

"Oh—distribution of wealth—supply and demand—sugar-bounties and blue-books—is that it? Well, well, what the young men of the present day are coming to——"

She could say no more; for at this moment her neighbour, an elderly and learned gentleman from Oxford, addressed her. He had not hitherto uttered a word, having paid strict attention to every dish and every wine (albeit he was a lean and famished-looking person); but now he remarked that the evenings were hot for the middle of June. He spoke of the danger of having recourse to iced fluids. Then he went on to compare the bathing of the Greeks and Romans with the ablutions of the English—until he was offered strawberries, whereupon, having helped himself largely, he fell into a business-like silence again.

When at length the ladies had gone upstairs, Lord Musselburgh came and took the seat just vacated by Mrs. Ellison.

"I have a commission from your father, Vin," said he. "I am to persuade you of the sweet reasonableness of his project—that you should for a time become the private secretary of Mr. Ogden."

"The private secretary of a man who hasn't an *h*!" retorted Master Vin, with scorn.

"What has that to do with it?" the young nobleman said, coolly. "No. After all, there is something in what your father says. He believes that the next great political and social movement will be the emancipation of the wage-earner—the securing to the producer his fair share of the products of his labour. If that is so, it will be a big thing. It will be years before it comes off, no doubt; but then there will be a great wave of public opinion; and if you are prepared—if you are there—if

you are identified with this tremendous social revolution, why, that magnificent wave will peacefully and calmly lift you into the Cabinet. I think that's about his notion. Very well. If you are willing to take up this work, how could you begin better than by becoming private secretary to Josiah Ogden? There you would come into direct touch with the masses; you would get to know at first hand what they are thinking of, what they are hoping for; subsequently, you could speak with authority. Then there's another thing, Vin. If you want to become a figure in public life in England, if you want to build a splendid monument for yourself, you should begin at the base. Capture the multitude; be as red-hot a Radical as they can desire; and they won't mind what you do afterwards. You may accept office; you may be petted by Royalty; but they will rather like it—they will look on it as a compliment paid to one of themselves. And that is where Ogden would come in. He, too, is one of themselves—though he has his hired brougham when he comes to town, and his big dinners at the Menagerie Club. What have you got to do with his *h's*? If I want to back a horse, or order a pair of boots, or have my hair cut, what does it matter to me whether the man has an *h*, or a superfluity of *h's*? You make him useful to you; you get what you want; isn't that enough?"

"Oh, no, it is not," Vincent rejoined—but respectfully, for he never forgot that Lord Musselburgh was his senior by very nearly five years. "You see, you don't go into partnership with your hairdresser, and you don't put your name over the bootmaker's shop. And I shouldn't learn much from Mr. Ogden, for I don't believe in his machine-made politics—everything to be done by committees, and resolutions, and majorities. I expect to find him starting a Society for the Suppression of Punch and Judy Shows, so that the infantile mind of England may not be corrupted by exhibitions of brutality."

"He is a very able man, let me tell you that," said Musselburgh with decision. "And a capital speaker—a slogger, of course, but that is wanted for big crowds. And sometimes he turns out a neat thing. Did you notice what he said at Sheffield the other day—telling the working men not to be too grateful for rich men's charities—for recreation grounds, drinking fountains, and the like? What he said was this—'When the capitalist has robbed Peter, it is easy for him to salve his conscience by throwing a crust to Paul'—not bad. I think you might do worse, Vin, than become Ogden's private secre-

tary. Pretty hard work, of course; but the modern young man, in politics, is supposed to be thoroughly in earnest: if he isn't he will have to reckon with the evening papers, for they don't like to be trifled with."

The subject was not a grateful one, apparently; Vincent changed it.

"Do you remember," he said, with some little diffidence, "that—that I was in your house one afternoon, a few weeks ago when an old gentleman called—and—and his granddaughter——"

"The perfervid old Scotchman—yes!"

"How did you come to know him?" the young man asked, with downcast eyes.

"I hardly recollect. Let me see. I think he first of all wrote to me, enclosing a note of introduction he had brought from a friend of mine in New York—a brother Scot. Then, as you saw, he called, and told me something further about a book he is going to bring out; and I gave him some little assistance—I don't think he is above accepting a few sovereigns from any one to help him on his way through the world."

Vin Harris flushed hotly—and he raised his head and looked his friend straight in the face as he put the next question.

"But—but he is a gentleman!—his name—his family—even his bearing——"

"Oh, yes, yes, I suppose so," Lord Musselburgh said, lightly. "Poor old fellow, I was glad to lend him a helping hand. I think his enthusiasm, his patriotism, was genuine; and it is a thing you don't often meet with nowadays."

"Yes—but—but——" Vincent said, with a good deal of embarrassment, and yet with some touch of half-indignant remonstrance, "the money you gave him—that was to aid him in bringing out the book, wasn't it?"

"Certainly, certainly!" the other made answer—he did not happen to notice the expression on his friend's face. "Something about Scotland—Scotch poetry—I think when he wrote he said something about a dedication, but that is an honour I hardly covet."

"In any case," observed the young man, "you have no right to say he would accept money from—from anyone—from a stranger."

Then Lord Musselburgh did look up—struck by something in his companion's tone.

"Did I say that? I'm sure I don't know. Of course it was

on account of the book that I ventured to give him some little help—oh, yes, certainly—I should not have ventured otherwise. If he had been offended, I daresay he would have said so; but I fancy the old gentleman has had to overcome his pride before now. He seems to have led a curious, wandering life. By the way, Vin, weren't you very much impressed by the young lady—I remember your saying something——”

Fortunately there was no need for Vincent to answer this question; for now there began a general movement on the part of the remaining guests to go upstairs to the drawing-room; and in this little bit of a bustle he escaped from further cross-examination.

When at the end of the evening all the people had gone away, and when Harland Harris had shut himself up in his study to finish his correspondence—for he was going down the next morning to a Congress of Co-operative Societies at Ipswich—Mrs. Ellison and her nephew found themselves alone in the drawing-room; and the fair young widow must needs return to the subject she had been discoursing upon at dinner—namely, that this young man, in order to guard against pitfalls and embroilments, should get married forthwith.

“You seem anxious that I should marry,” said he, bluntly; “why don't you get married yourself?”

“Oh, no, thank you!” she replied, with promptitude. “I know when I have had——” Apparently she was on the point of saying that she knew when she had had enough; but that would not have been complimentary to the memory of the deceased; so she abruptly broke off—and then resumed. “It isn't necessary for me to make any further experiments in life; but for you, with such a splendid future before you, it is a necessity. As for me, I mean to let well alone. And it is well—very well. I do believe, Vin, that I am the only woman on this earth——”

“What?” he said.

“—who is really contented. I am too happy. Sometimes I'm afraid; it seems as if I had no right to it. Why, when I come downstairs in the morning, and draw an easy-chair to the open windows—especially when there is a breeze coming off the sea, and the sun-blinds are out, and the balcony nicely shaded, you know—I mean at home, in Brunswick Terrace—well, when I take up the newspaper and begin to read about what's going on—as if it was all some kind of a distant thing—I feel so satisfied with the quiet and the coolness and the sea-air that I am bound to do a little kindness to somebody, and so I turn to

the columns where appeals are made for charity. I don't care what it is; I'm so well content that I must give something to somebody—distressed Irish widows, sailors' libraries, days in the country, anything. I dare say I sometimes give money where I shouldn't; but how am I to know?—and at any rate it pleases me."

"But why shouldn't you be happy, aunt?" said the young man. "You are so good-humoured, and so kind, and so nice to look at, that it is no wonder you are such a favourite, with men especially."

"Oh, yes," she said, frankly. "Men are always nice to you—except the one you happen to marry; and I'm not going to spoil the situation. At present they're all sweetness, and that suits me: I'm not going to give any one of them the chance of showing himself an ungrateful brute. When I come downstairs at Brighton, I like to see only one cup on the breakfast-table, and to feel that I have the whole room to myself. Selfish?—then you can make amends by sending something to the Children's Hospital or the People's Palace or something of that kind."

"Do you know, aunt," he observed, gravely, "what Mr. Ogden says of you? He says that, having robbed Peter, you try to salve your conscience by throwing a crust to Paul."

"When did I rob Peter?—what Peter?" she said, indignantly.

"You are a capitalist—you have more than your own share—you possess what you do not work for—therefore you are a robber and a plunderer. I am sorry for you, aunt; but Mr. Ogden has pronounced your doom——"

"Mr. Ogden——!" she said, with angry brows—and then she stopped.

"Yes, aunt?" he said, encouragingly.

"Oh, nothing. But I tell you this, Vin. You were talking of the proper distribution of wealth. Well, when you come to marry, and if I approve of the girl, I mean to distribute a little of my plunder—of my ill-gotten gains—in that direction: she shan't come empty-handed. That is, if I approve of her, you understand. And the best thing you can do is to alter your mind and come down to Brighton for a week or two; and I'll send for the Drexel girls and perhaps one or two more. If you can't just at present, you may later on. Now I'm going off to my room; and I'll say good-bye as well as good-night; for I don't suppose I shall see you in the morning."

"Good-night, then, and good-bye, aunt!" said he, as he held her hand for a second; and that was the last that he saw of her for some considerable time.

For a great change was about to take place in this young man's position and circumstances, in his interests, and ambitions, and trembling hopes. He was about to enter wonderland—that so many have entered, stealthily and almost fearing—that so many remember, and perhaps would fain forget. Do any remain in that mystic and rose-hued region? Some, at least, have never even approached it; for its portals are not easily discoverable, are not discoverable at all, indeed, except by the twin torches of imagination and abolition of self.

When he went up to his chambers the next morning he was surprised to find a card lying on the table; he had not expected a visitor in this secluded retreat. And when he glanced at the name, he was still more perturbed. What an opportunity he had missed! Perhaps Mr. Bethune had brought an informal little invitation for him—the first overture of friendliness? He might have spent the evening in the hushed, small parlour over the way, with those violin strains vibrating through the dusk; or, with the lights ablaze, he might have sate and listened to the old man's tales of travel, while Maisrie Bethune would be sitting at her needle-work, but looking up from time to time—each glance a world's wonder! And what had he had in exchange?—a vapid dinner-party; some talk about socialism; an invitation that he should descend into the catacombs of North of England politics and labour mole-like there to no apparent end; finally, a promise that if he would only marry the young lady of Mrs. Ellison's choice—presumably one of her American friends—his bride should have some additional dowry to recommend her. What were all those distant schemes, and even the brilliant future that everybody seemed to prophesy for him, to the bewildering possibilities that were almost within his reach? He went to the window. The pots of musk, and lobelia, and ox-eye daisies, in the little balcony over there, and also the Virginia creeper intertwisting its sprays through the iron bars, seemed fresh: no doubt she had sprinkled them with water before leaving with her grandfather. And had they gone to Hyde Park as usual? He was sorely tempted to go in search; but something told him this might provoke suspicions; so he resolutely hauled in a chair to the table and set to work with his books and annotations—though sometimes there came before his eyes a nebulous

vision, as of a sheet of silver-grey water and a shimmering of elms.

In the afternoon he went out and bought a clothes-brush, a couple of hair-brushes, some scented soap, and other toilet requisites—of which he had not hitherto known the need in these chambers; and about five o'clock or a little thereafter, having carefully removed the last speck from his coat-sleeve, he crossed the way, and rather timidly knocked at the door. It was opened by the landlady's daughter, who appeared at once surprised and pleased on finding who this visitor was.

"Is Mr. Bethune at home?" he demanded—with some vaguely uncomfortable feeling that this damsel's eyes looked too friendly. She seemed to understand everything—to have been expecting him.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"May I go upstairs?"

He gave no name; but she did not hesitate for a moment. She led the way upstairs; she tapped lightly; and in answer to Mr. Bethune's loud "Come in!" she opened the door, and said—

"The young gentleman, sir,"—a form of announcement that might have struck Vincent as peculiar if he had not been much too occupied to notice.

"Ah, how do you do—how do you do?" old George Bethune (who was alone) called out, and he pushed aside his book and came forward with extended hand. "Nothing like being neighbourly; solitary units in the great sea of London life have naturally some interest in each other: you would gather that I looked in on you last night——"

"Yes," said the young man, as he took the proffered chair. "I am very sorry I happened to be out—I had to dine at home last evening——"

"At home?" repeated Mr. Bethune, looking for the moment just a trifle puzzled.

"Oh, yes," said his visitor, rather nervously. "Perhaps I didn't explain. I don't *live* over there, you know. I only have the rooms for purposes of study; the place is so quiet I can get on better than at home; there are no interruptions——"

"Except a little violin-playing?" the old man suggested, good-naturedly.

"I wish there were more of that, sir," Vincent observed, respectfully. "That was only in the evenings; and I used to wait for it, to tell you the truth, as a kind of unintentional

reward after my day's work. But of late I have heard nothing; I hope that Miss Bethune was not offended that I ventured to—to open my piano at the same time——”

“Oh, not at all—I can hardly think so,” her grandfather said, airily. “She also has been busy with her books of late—it is Dante, I believe, at present—and as I insist on her always reading aloud, whatever the language is, she goes upstairs to her own room; so that I haven't seen much of her in the evenings. Now may I offer you a cigar?”

“No, thank you.”

“Or a glass of claret?”

“No, thanks.”

“Then tell me what your studies are, that we may become better acquainted.”

And Vincent was about to do that when the door behind him opened. Instinctively he rose and turned. The next instant Maisrie Bethune was before him—looking taller, he thought, than he had, in Hyde Park, imagined her to be. She saluted him gravely and without embarrassment; perhaps she had been told of his arrival; it was he who was, for the moment, somewhat confused, and anxious to apologise and explain. But, curiously enough, that was only a passing phase. When once he had realised that she also was in the room—not paying much attention, perhaps, but listening when she chose, as she attended to some flowers she had brought for the central table—all his embarrassment fled, and his natural buoyancy and confidence came to his aid. She, on her side, seemed to consider that she was of no account; that she was not called upon to interfere in this conversation between her grandfather and his guest. When she had finished with the flowers, she went to the open window, and took her seat, opening out some needlework she had carried thither. The young man could see she had beautiful hands—rather long, perhaps, but exquisitely formed: another wonder! But the truly extraordinary thing—the enchantment—was that here he was in the same room with her, likely to become her friend, and already privileged to speak so that she could hear!

For of course he was aware that he had an audience of two; and very well he talked, in his half-excited mood. There was no more timidity; there was a gay self-assertion—a desire to excel and shine; sometimes he laughed, and his laugh was musical. He had skillfully drawn from the old man a confession of political faith (of course he was a Conservative, as

became one of the Bethunes of Balloray), so all chance of collision was avoided on that point; and indeed Vin Harris was ready to have sworn that black was white, so eager was he to make an impression, on this his first, and wondrous visit.

The time went by all too quickly; but the young man had become intoxicated by this unexpected joy; instead of getting up and apologising, and taking his hat, and going away, he boldly threw out the suggestion that these three—these solitary units in the great sea of London life, as George Bethune had called them—should determine to spend the evening together. He did not seem to be aware of the audacity of his proposal; he was carrying everything before him in a high-handed fashion; the touch of colour that rose to Maisrie Bethune's cheek—what of that? Oh, yes, maiden shyness, no doubt; but of little consequence; here were the golden moments—here the golden opportunity: why should they separate?

"You see," said he, "I don't care to inconvenience our people at home by my uncertain hours; and so of late I have taken to dining at a restaurant, just when I felt inclined; and I have got to know something of the different places. I think we might go out for a little stroll, as the evening will be cooler now, and wander on until we see a quiet and snug-looking corner. There is something in freedom of choice; and you may catch sight of a bay window, or of a recess with flowers in it, and a bit of a fountain that tempts the eye——"

"What do you say, Maisrie?" the old gentleman inquired.

"You go, grandfather," the girl replied at once, but without raising her head. "It will be a pleasant change for you. I would rather remain at home."

"Oh, but I should never have proposed such a thing," Vincent interposed, hastily, "if it meant that Miss Bethune was to be left here alone, certainly not! I—I decline to be a party to any such arrangement—oh, I could not think of such a thing!"

"You'd better come, Maisrie," said the old man, with some air of authority.

"Very well, grandfather," she said, obediently; and straightway she rose and left the room.

Master Vin's heart beat high; here were wonders upon wonders; in a short space he would be walking along the pavements of London town with Maisrie Bethune by his side (or practically so) and thereafter he and she would be seated at the same table, almost within touch of each other. Would the

wide world get to hear of this marvellous thing? Would the men and women whom they encountered in Oxford-street observe and conjecture, and perhaps pass on with some faint vision of that beautiful and pensive face imprinted on their memory? By what magic freak of fortune had he come to be so favoured? Those people in Oxford-street were all strangers to her, and would remain strangers; he alone would be admitted to the sacred privacies of her companionship and society; but a few minutes more, and he would be instructing himself in her little ways and preferences, each one a happy secret to be kept wholly to himself. But the entranced young man was hardly prepared for what now followed. When the door opened again, and Maisrie Bethune reappeared (her eyes were averted from him, and there was a self-conscious tinge of colour in her pale and thoughtful face) she seemed to have undergone some sudden transformation. The youthful look lent to her appearance by the long and loose-flowing locks and by her plain dress of blue and white linen had gone; and here was a young lady apparently about twenty, tall, self-possessed (notwithstanding that tinge of colour) and grave in manner. A miracle had been wrought!—and yet she had only plaited up her hair, tying it with a bit of blue ribbon, and donned a simple costume of cream-coloured cashmere. She was putting on her gloves now; and he thought that long hands were by far the most beautiful of any.

Well, it was all a bewilderment—this walking along the London streets under the pale saffron of the evening sky, listening to the old man's emphatic monologue, but far more intent on warning Miss Bethune of the approach of a cab, when she was about to cross this or the other thoroughfare. Once he touched her arm in his anxiety to check her; he had not intended to do so; and it was he who was thunderstruck and ashamed; she did not appear to have noticed. And then again he was afraid lest she should be tired before they reached the particular restaurant he had in mind; to which old George Bethune replied that his granddaughter did not know what fatigue was; he and she could walk for a whole day, strolling through the parks or along the streets, with absolute ease and comfort, as became vagrants and world-wanderers.

"Though I am not so sure it is altogether good for Maisrie here," he continued. "It may be that that has kept her thin—she is too thin for a young lass. She is all spirit; she has no more body than a daddy long-legs."

Vincent instantly offered to call a cab—which they refused; but he was not beset by wild alarms; he knew that, however slight she might be, the natural grace and elegance of her carriage could only be the outcome of a symmetrical form in conjunction with elastic health. That conclusion he had arrived at in the Park; but now he noticed another thing—that, as she walked, the slightly-swaying arms had the elbow well into the waist, and the wrist turned out, and that quite obviously without set purpose. It was a pretty movement; but it was more than merely graceful; it was one mark of a well-balanced figure, even as was her confident step. For her step could be confident enough, and the set of her head proud enough—if she mostly kept her eyes to the ground.

It was an Italian restaurant they entered at last; and Vincent was so fortunate as to find a recess-compartment, which he knew of, vacant. They were practically dining in a private room; but all the same they could when they chose glance out upon the large saloon, with its little white tables, and its various groups of olive-complexioned or English-complexioned guests. The young man assumed the management of this small festivity from the outset. He ordered a flask of Chianti for Mr. Bethune and himself; and then he would have got something lighter—some sparkling beverage—for the young lady, but that she told him that she drank no wine. Why, he said to himself, he might have known!—

‘for in her veins

Ran blood as pure and cool as summer rains.’

And as this modest little repast went on, perhaps Vincent was comparing it with the banquet of the night before. Ah, there had been no entrancement, no enthralling ecstasy and delight, about *that* entertainment, sumptuous as it was. Here was some food—he hardly looked at it—he did not know what it was, and did not care—which would have to be paid for at the rate of 3s. 6d. per head; but as compared with this frugal festivity, the splendours of the preceding evening—the masses of roses, the pyramids of ice, the silver candelabra, and all the rest—shrank into insignificance. Here there was a nameless glamour filling all the air; a palpitation of hope, and a curious dumb sense of gratitude as if for favours unexpected and undeserved; all the coming years of his life seemed to be shining there in her eyes—so that he hardly dared to look, so full of fear, and yet of a breathless joy and wonder, was the revelation, when she

happened to glance towards him. And on her side, she appeared to be a little less reserved and distant than she had hitherto been. She seemed grateful for the trouble the young man had taken on behalf of her grandfather and herself; sometimes, when in his eager talk he said something that interested her, she raised her head, with a smile in her eyes. A wonderful banquet, truly, though not so imposing as that of the previous night. He learned that she was immensely fond of propelling a gondola (the forward oar only; she wanted another oar astern to steer) and here was another amazingly interesting fact, to be for ever and ever remembered.

As for the old man (for the world was not created solely for young folk) he was at once gay and oracular.

"These little breaks and diversions," he was saying, as he stirred his coffee—the time of cigarettes having now arrived, "are useful things—useful things; an affair of the moment, truly; but the wise man makes of the passing moment as much as he possibly can. Why, the real curse of modern life—the ineradicable disease—is the habit of continually looking before and after. We none of us think enough of the present moment; we are anxiously speculating as to the future; or, what is worse still, fretting over the memory of past injuries and past mistakes. That is where the uneducated, the unimaginative, have their consolation; we are not half so happy and content as the stolid ploughman or the phlegmatic bricklayer who thinks only of the present heat, or the present cold, or, at furthest, of the next pint of beer, and of the prospect of getting to bed, with the knowledge that he will sleep sound. The actual and immediate things before them are the things that interest them; not the unknown future, or the useless past. But I have schooled myself, thanks in a great measure to Horace—and my granddaughter knows her Horace too—and I think I keep as stout a heart as most. *Dum loquimur*, of course, *fugerit invida ætas*; but even while I know that the night presses down upon me, and the shadowy fathers, and the empty halls of Pluto, I put the knowledge away from me; I am content with the present moment; I am more than content, for example, with this very excellent cigarette—"

"Would you allow me to send you a few boxes?" interposed Vincent, at once and eagerly. "I think the cork mouthpiece is a great improvement. I know where they are to be got. May I send you some?"

"I thank you; but they are not much in my way," the old

man said, with a certain loftiness of demeanour. "As I was remarking, the time has gone by for unavailing regrets over what has been done to me and mine. I think I may say that throughout we have shown a bold front. '*Stand fast, Craig-Royston!*' has not been our watchword for nothing. And as for the future—why, 'to the gods belongs to-morrow!' The anticipation of evil will not remove it: the recalling of bygone injuries provides no compensation. 'The present moment is our ain; the neist we never saw;' and so, as we have had a pleasant evening so far, I think we may as well get away home again; and, Maisrie, you will get out your violin, and we'll have some Scotch songs, and my young friend and I will taste just a drop of Scotch whisky; and if there's any better combination than that in the world, I do not know of it."

But here a very awkward incident occurred. Old George Bethune, in his grand manner, called to the waiter to bring the bill. Now Vincent had intended to steal out and arrange this little matter without allowing the young lady to have any cognisance of it; but of course the waiter, when summoned, came up to the table, and proceeded to pencil out the account.

"I think, sir," put in the young man, modestly, "you'd better let me have that. It was my proposal, you know."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Bethune, carelessly; and as carelessly he handed over the slip of paper he had just taken from the waiter.

But the quick look of pain and humiliation that swept over the girl's face stabbed the young man to the heart.

"Grandfather!" she said, with a burning flush.

"Oh, well," her grandfather said, petulantly; "I have just discovered that I have left my purse behind. Some other time—it is all the same—it is immaterial—the next time will be my turn—"

"Here is my purse, grandfather," she said; and she turned with an air of quiet firmness to her younger neighbour, and merely said "If you please!" He was too bewildered to refuse: there was something in her manner that compelled him to accede without a word of protest. She pushed her purse and the slip of paper across the table to her grandfather; and then she rose, and turned to seek her sun-shade, which Vincent forthwith brought to her. The curious mingling of simplicity and dignity with which she had interposed impressed him strangely: perhaps she was not so much of a school-girl as she had seemed when he first saw her walking through Hyde Park?

Then the three of them left the restaurant together; and quietly made their way home through the gathering twilight.

But he would not go in when they arrived at their door, though the old man again put Scotch music and Scotch whisky before him as an inducement. Perhaps he dreaded to outstay his welcome. He bade them both good-night; and Maisrie Bethune, as she parted from him, was so kind as to say "Thank you so much!" with the briefest, timid glance of her all-too-eloquent eyes.

He went across to his own rooms—merely for form's sake. He did not light the gas when he got upstairs. He carefully shut the window; then he sate down to the piano; and very gently and quietly he played a graceful little air. It was "*Dormez, dormez, ma belle!*"; and it was a kind of farewell message for the night; but he had made sure that she should not hear.

CHAPTER V.

QU' MON CŒUR EN MARIAGE.

WHEN Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather returned home after the little dinner at the restaurant she went upstairs to her own room, while he proceeded to summon the landlady's husband from the lower déeps. Forthwith the pallid-faced and nervous-eyed Hobson appeared; and he seemed to be more obsequious than ever towards the great man who had deigned to patronise his humble literary efforts, and had even got some of his verses printed in the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*.

"Very hot evening, sir—yes, sir—would you like me to go and fetch you a little hicc, sir?" said he, in his eager desire to please. "No trouble, sir, if agreeable to you—remarkably 'ot for June, sir—theatres doing nothing, sir—only the ballet: you see, sir, the young ladies have so little on that they look cool and airy-like, and I suppose, sir, that's why the ballet is so popular—yes, sir, my brother-in-law, the theatrical agent—"

"Look here, Hobson," Mr. Bethune observed, as if he had not heard a word, "you have no doubt noticed a young gentleman who occupies rooms over the way?"

"Oh, yes, sir—a very handsome young man," he answered—or rather, what he actually did say was, "a werry ensome young men."

"I have just made his acquaintance," Mr. Bethune continued, in his lofty fashion, "and naturally I should like to know something more of him, though I could not be guilty of the rudeness of asking him questions about himself. For example, I should be glad to know where he lives—he only uses those rooms during the day, you understand; and I presume that would be a simple thing for you to ascertain—discreetly, I mean, discreetly—without any impertinent intrusion."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Hobson, his dull face lighting up with pleasure at the notion of being able to do his patron a service. "Yes, yes, sir; I can find out; what more simple?"

At this very moment there was the sound of a door being shut on the opposite side of the street. Hobson stepped to the open window; and instantly withdrew his head again.

"He has just gone out, sir—I will follow him."

"But discreetly, Hobson, discreetly," was the old gentleman's final injunction, as his humble and zealous emissary departed.

When Maisrie Bethune came downstairs again, she was in her ordinary dress of striped linen; and she seemed pleased with the evening's adventure; and was more talkative than usual.

"It will be very pleasant for you, grandfather," said she, "to have so intelligent and interesting a neighbour—don't you think so? For though he is young, he seems to know everything, and to have been everywhere; and I am sure, you and he, grandfather, found plenty of things to talk about. I have just been wondering whether it is possible he could have come to Toronto while we were living there. Wouldn't that have been strange? Perhaps we have passed him while we were walking along King-street; perhaps he may have come round the corner by the Bank of Montreal when we were going into Yonge-street—and not a yard between us! But no," she continued, musingly, "I hardly imagine it could have been. I think I should have noticed him, and remembered. Don't you think you would have noticed him, grandfather? He is not like any one else—I mean he is not the kind of person you would pass in the street without remarking—I don't think you would forget. Oh, yes, I am very glad for your sake, grand-

father, that you have made his acquaintance; and I hope you will become good friends—although he is young. You want some one to talk to—and not that dreadful Hobson—I can't bear your talking to Hobson, grandfather—”

“I am no respecter of persons, Maisrie,” said the old man, pompously, “so long as people know their place, and keep it.”

“But that is just the worst of Hobson, grandfather!” she exclaimed. “His fawning and cringing is so despicable. He is not a man at all. And you should tell him the truth about those verses of his, grandfather: I can't imagine how you see anything in them—”

“There have been worse—there have been worse,” said Mr. Bethune, with a magnanimous toleration. “And on the two occasions on which I got the *Chronicle* to let him see himself in print, the gratitude of the poor creature was quite pathetic. A little act of kindness is never thrown away, Maisrie, my dear. So now you'll just get out your violin, and for a little while we will cross the Border, and forget that we are here in the heart of this stifling London.”

But Maisrie begged to be excused. She said she was rather tired, and was going back to her own room very soon. And indeed, when she had brought her grandfather his accustomed hot water, and sugar, and spirits, and generally made everything comfortable for him, she kissed him and bade him good night and went away upstairs.

It was not to go to bed, however. Having lit the gas, she proceeded to hunt among her books until she discovered a little album entitled “Views of Toronto;” and having spread that open on her dressing-table, she drew in a chair, and, with her elbows resting on the table, and her head between her hands, began to pore over those pictures of the long thoroughfares and the pavements and the public buildings. She seemed to find the rather ill-executed lithographs interesting—so interesting that we may leave her there with her eyes fixed intently on the brown pages.

Meanwhile Hobson had fulfilled his mission, and returned with the address of the house into which he had seen the young man disappear; and not only that, but he volunteered to gain any further information that Mr. Bethune might wish; it would be easy for him, he said, to make the acquaintance of one of the menservants in Grosvenor Place.

“Not at all—not at all!” the old man made response, with an affectation of indifference. “I have no wish to pry. Indeed,

I cannot say that I have any particular curiosity in the matter. And you need not mention to any one that I know even as much as that. I cannot recall now what made me ask—a momentary impulse—nothing of any consequence—for in truth it matters little to me where the young man lives. Well, good-night, Hobson—and thank you.”

“Good-night, sir,” said Hobson, with his eyes dwelling lingeringly on the hot water and whisky. But he received no invitation (for old George Bethune was more amenable to his granddaughter’s remonstrances than he himself was aware) and so, with another effusive “*Good-night!*” the landlady’s husband humbly withdrew.

Sometimes, after Maisrie had gone to bed, or, at least, retired to her own room, her grandfather would wander away out in the streets by himself. The night air was cool; there were fewer passers-by to impede his aimless peregrinations; sheltered by the dark and the dull lamp-light, he could lift up his voice and sing “London’s bonnie woods and braes,” or “Cam’ ye by Athol,” or “There’s nae Covenant now, lassie,” when he happened to be in the mood, as he generally was. And on this particular evening he sallied forth; but the straightforward direction of his steps showed that he had an objective point. He went along Oxford-street, and down Regent-street; and eventually, by way of Garrick-street, Covent Garden, and the Strand, reached Fleet-street, where he stopped at a building almost wholly consisting of offices of country newspapers. At this time of the night the place was at its busiest—a hive of industry: messengers coming and going, the operators assiduous at the special wires, the London correspondents constructing their letters out of the latest news, with a little imagination thrown in here and there to lend colour. Old George Bethune ascended to the first floor, passed into the premises owned by the *Edinburgh Chronicle (Daily and Weekly)* and was admitted to an inner room, where he found Mr. Courtney Fox. Now Mr. Fox—a heavy and somewhat ungainly person, who rolled from side to side as he crossed the room, and whose small blue eyes twinkled behind his spectacles with a sort of easy and ready sarcasm—did not like being interrupted; but, on the other hand, Mr. Bethune was a friend, or at least a favoured acquaintance, of the chief proprietor of the *Chronicle*, and the London correspondent was therefore bound to be civil; so he asked the old man what he could do for him.

“If you have anything for the *Weekly*,” he observed, “you’d

much better send it on direct to Edinburgh, instead of sending it down here. That will save one postage—a point which I should have thought would occur to a Scotch mind,” he added, with a bit of a half-concealed grin.

“You are always girding at Scotland, Mr. Fox,” George Bethune said, good-naturedly.

“I? Oh, not I. I’m sure no one admires the virtues of economy and frugality more than I do. That is why I am pretty certain Shakespeare must have lived in Scotland—I don’t mean ‘The rain it raineth every day’—but ‘a tanner will last you nine year.’ Now how could he have learned that money could be made to go so far but by observation of the Scotch?”

“I know this,” said the old man, with some dignity, “that few have seen so much of the world as I have, in various countries and climes; and the most generous and hospitable people—generous and hospitable to the point of extravagance—I have ever met with have invariably been the Scotch. It may suit you to revile the country from which you get your living—”

“Oh, I meant nothing so serious, I assure you,” the ponderous journalist said at once. “Come, tell me what I can do for you.”

“I should like to look at the Post Office Directory first, if I may.”

Courtney Fox waddled across the room and returned with the heavy volume: Mr. Bethune turned to the street and number that had been furnished him by his spy, and discovered that the name given was Harland Harris—no doubt Vincent Harris’s father.

“Ah, yes,” the old man said. “Now I can tell you what I want; and I am certain I have come to the right place for information. For while you revile my countrymen, Mr. Fox, because you don’t know them, I wonder whom amongst your own countrymen—who have any position at all—you don’t know?”

This was an adroit piece of flattery: for it was a foible of the fat correspondent to affect that he knew everybody—and knew no good of anybody.

“Of course the man I mean may be a nobody—or a nonentity—and a very respectable person as well,” continued Mr. Bethune, “but his son, whose acquaintance I have made, talks as if his name were familiar to the public. Mr. Harland Harris—”

"Harland Harris!" the journalist exclaimed—but with much complacency, for he might have been found wanting. "Don't you know Harland Harris?—or, at least, haven't you heard of him?"

"I have lived much out of England," the old man said.

"And you want me to tell you who and what Harland Harris is? Is that it? Well, then, I will. To begin with," proceeded Mr. Courtnay Fox, with a baleful light in his small twinkling eyes, "he is a solemn and portentous ass—a pedantic prig—a combination of a drill serjeant and a schoolmaster, with the self-sufficiency of—of—I don't know what. He is an enormously wealthy man—who preaches the Divine Beauty of Poverty; a socialist—who would abolish the income-tax, and have all taxation indirect; a Communist—who can eat only off gold plate. This sham Jean Jacques would not only abandon his children, he would let the whole human race go to the mischief, as long as you left him on a pinnacle, with a MS. lecture in his hand. Harland Harris! Do you want to know any more? Well, I will tell you this, that long ago his vanity would have inflated and burst him only that he was defeated in his candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Edinburgh University—and that let out a little of the gas. But even now his inconsistencies are colossal—almost a madness; I think he must be drunk with a sense of his own superiority, as George Sand says—"

"He does not seem to have made a very favourable impression on you," said Mr. Bethune slowly and thoughtfully.

"Did he ever on any human being?" the other retorted. "Not any one that ever I heard of!"

"And his son—do you know anything of him?"

Mr. Courtnay Fox was not likely to admit that he knew nothing.

"Oh," said he, scornfully, "the *enfant gâté* of the political world. — has made a pet of him; and so people imagine there is something in him. Of course he'll talk for a few years about universal brotherhood and the advancement of humanity and that kind of stuff; and then, when he succeeds to his father's money, he'll make a bid for a peerage, or else marry a widowed and withered Countess, and subside into a solid, substantial, beef-headed bulwark of the Tory party. That's the way they all go!"

"Well, I'm very much obliged," said old George Bethune, rising. "And sorry to have interrupted you. Good-night—and thanks."

"Good-night," said the journalist, curtly, as he turned to his desk again, and its litter of reports and telegrams.

Next morning, when they were about to set forth on their accustomed stroll, Maisrie paused at the door for a second, and said—with a very curious hesitation, and a face grown rose-red—

"Grandfather, what shall I tell Mrs. Hobson you would like for dinner?"

He did not notice her confusion; he answered, carelessly—

"Oh, never mind just now. Later on we will see. Food is not of much importance in this hot weather."

Thereafter she was silent for some considerable time. It was not until they had got down to the Serpentine, and when he was about to take out his newspaper, that she ventured again to address him.

"Grandfather," she said, timidly, "do you think—Mr. Harris—expects us—expects that we should dine together again this evening? He did ask if we had no engagement—and—and perhaps he may imagine there is some understanding—"

"Well, Maisrie," the old man made answer, with a playful irony, "if your way of it is to be carried out, the arrangement wouldn't last very long. I don't suppose our little income could comfortably support three for any great space of time."

"Oh, but, grandfather," she said, persuasively, "you know it was but right you should pay; we were two, and he only one; of course, if we were to dine together again—and he wished it to be his turn—you might divide—"

"I think, Maisrie," said he, somewhat sententiously, "it would be better for you to leave our small financial affairs in my hands. These things are well understood as between men; it is easy to make an arrangement. Especially easy if you are the only son of a very wealthy man—what are a few shillings or a few sovereigns one way or the other to him? And I wish you to remember that a young lady's purse is not usually produced at a restaurant."

"I am sorry if I did anything wrong, grandfather," she said humbly; "but—but I thought—before a stranger—or almost a stranger—it was a pity you had forgotten—"

He had opened the newspaper, so that the subject was dismissed; and Maisrie was left to her absent dreams and reveries.

All that day there came no message from the other side of the street; and likewise the afternoon wore away in silence; while Maisrie, whatever she hoped or feared, had not again

asked her grandfather what arrangements he proposed for the evening. About six o'clock, however, there came a rap at the door below. Maisrie was in her room upstairs. Her grandfather was seated at the little table in the parlour, drawing out in water-colour a coat of arms; and he had already finished the Bethune part of it—that is to say, the first and fourth quarters of the shield were argent, with a fesse between three mascles, or; and likewise he had surmounted it with the crest—an otter's head, erased, ppr.; but as the second and third quarters were still vacant it was impossible to say with which other family he proposed to claim alliance. At this moment Vincent made his appearance at the door, looking very cheerful and good-humoured, and modest withal; and he came into the room as if he already felt quite at home there.

"I have taken a little liberty," said he, "with regard to this evening. I understood that you and Miss Bethune had no engagement, and might think of going to that same restaurant again; but then I thought you might prefer a change; and so I have ordered dinner at the ——" And he named a well-known hotel in the neighbourhood of Burlington Gardens.

"Oh, you have ordered dinner?"

"Yes, sir," said Vincent, respectfully; and then seeing there was no objection, he went on with a gayer air: "It does seem absurd that when people want to meet each other, and to talk, and get thoroughly acquainted, they must needs sit down and eat together; but there is some sense in it too; for of course we have all of us our different occupations during the day; and dinner-time is the time at which we all find ourselves free, so that the meeting is easily arranged. I hope Miss Bethune wasn't fatigued after her long walk of last evening—"

"Oh, no, no," said her grandfather, rising and going to the door. "I must call and tell her we are going out by and bye—"

"Yes, but of course she is coming too!" the young man said quickly.

"If she likes—if she likes. I myself should prefer it. I will ask her."

And on this occasion also, when she came down-stairs, Maisrie Bethune appeared in that simple dress of cream-coloured cashmere; and again he was struck by the alteration in her aspect; she was no longer the shy and timid schoolgirl he had at first imagined her to be, but a young woman, of quite sufficient self-possession, tall, and elegant of bearing, and with more

than a touch of graceful dignity in her manner. This time she smiled as she gave him her hand for a moment; and then she turned away; always she seemed to assume that this newly-found relationship existed only as between her grandfather and the young man, that she was outside of it, and only to be called in as an adjunct, now and again when it happened to suit them.

Nevertheless, as they by-and-bye walked away down to Burlington Gardens, she was much more animated and talkative than he had before seen her; and he observed, too, that her grandfather paid heed to her opinions. Nay, she addressed the younger of her two companions also, occasionally; and now she was not afraid to let a smile dwell in her eyes, when she chanced to turn to him. He was bewildered by it all; it was more, far more than he dared have hoped for; in fact he was the last person in the world to suspect that his own bearing—the buoyant unconscious audacity, the winning frankness, as well as a certain youthful modesty—was at the root of the mystery of this sudden friendship. For one thing, he had told them a good deal about himself and his circumstances, during that morning in Hyde Park and during the previous afternoon and evening; and there was something in the position of these three folk, now brought together after wide wanderings through the world, that seemed to invite confidence and intimacy. Then old George Bethune had an excellent fund of good-fellowship, so long as the present moment was an enjoyable one.

And, as it turned out, this evening proved to be one of those enjoyable moments. The small festivity to which Vincent had invited his new acquaintances was not in the least the haphazard affair he had half-intimated it to be; he had arranged it with care; they found themselves in a pretty room, with plenty of flowers on the table; while the little banquet itself was far more elaborate, both as regards food and wine, than there was any call for. The old gentleman did not protest; anything that happened—so long as it was pleasant—was welcome to him; and he declared the claret to be as excellent as any he had met with for years back. He could not understand why their youthful host would not join him (as if it were likely that Vincent was going to drink wine, now that he discovered that Maisrie Bethune drank only water!), but he had all the more for himself; and he waxed eloquent and enthusiastic on his favourite theme.

"Why, sir," said he, with a kind of proud elation in his tone, "I myself heard Henry Ward Beecher pronounce these words in the City Hall of Glasgow—'I have been reared in a country whose history is brief. So vast is it, that one might travel night and day for all the week, and yet scarcely touch historic ground. Its history is yet to be written; it is yet to be acted. But I come to this land, which, though small, is as full of memories as the heaven is full of stars, and almost as bright. There is not the most insignificant piece of water that does not make my heart thrill with some story of heroism, or some remembered poem; for not only has Scotland had the good fortune to have men who knew how to make heroic history, but she has reared those bards who have known how to sing their deeds. And every steep and every valley, and almost every single league on which my feet have trod, have made me feel as if I were walking in a dream. I never expected to find my eyes overflow with tears of gladness that I have been permitted, in the prime of life, to look upon this beloved land.' Well spoken—nobly spoken! When I take my granddaughter here to visit her native country—for to that country she belongs, in all the essentials of blood and tradition and descent—I hope she will be in a similarly receptive mood; and will see, not the bare hills, not the lonely islands, not the desolate moors, but a land filled with the magic of association, and consecrated by the love and devotion of a thousand song-writers, known and unknown. I will say with Johnson 'That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Bannockburn, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona'—"

"Not Bannockburn: Marathon, wasn't it, grandfather?" said Maisrie, in her gentle way.

"Well, well," he said, not heeding the interruption. "'Almost every single league,' said Ward Beecher; and that is true. I could make a pilgrimage throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, guided by the finger of Scottish song. Indeed I have often thought I should like, if the years were spared to me, to collect materials for a volume—a splendid and magnificent volume—on the Scotland of the Scotch songs and ballads. The words and the music are already there: and I would have the pencil add its charm; so that Scotland, in her noblest and fairest aspects, might be placed before the stranger, and might be welcomed once again by her own sons. I would have the lonely Braes o' Balwhidder, and Rob Roy's grave in the little

churchyard on the hillside; I would have Tannahill's Arran-teenie—that is on Loch Long side, I think; and the Bonnie House o' Airlie:

'It fell on a day, a bonnie summer's day,
When the corn grew green and fairly,
That the great Argyle, wi' a' his men,
Cam' to plunder the bonnie house o' Airlie.'

Then the Vale of Yarrow—well, perhaps that would have to be a figure subject—the grief-stricken maiden bending over the body of her slain lover—

'Pale though thou art, yet best, yet best beloved,
O could my warmth to life restore thee!—
Ye'd lie all night between my breasts;
No youth lay ever there before thee.'

And Colonsay—Leyden's Colonsay—the haunted island that mourns like a sea-shell—

'And ever as the year returns,
The charm-bound sailors know the day;
For sadly still the mermaid mourns
The lovely chief of Colonsay.'

Gala Water—"the old man continued, in a sort of exalted rhapsody; and his eyes were absent, as if he were beholding a succession of visions. "Hunting Tower—Craigie-burn Wood—the solitude sought out by Bessie Bell and her girl companion when they fled from the plague—Ettrick Banks—the bush aboon Traquair—in short, an endless series! And where the pencil may fail, imagination must come in—

'I see—but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of fancy still survives—
Her sunshine plays upon thee!'

It would be something to do for the sake of 'puir auld Scotland;' and think what an enchanted wandering that would be for both Maisrie and myself. Tweed and Teviot—the silver Forth—the stately Clyde: well, perhaps she would be better pleased to gather a flower or two—a lucken-gowan or a speedwell—on 'the bonnie banks o' Ayr.'

"But, grandfather," Maisrie Bethune interposed, "before you can begin such a book, or even think of it, you know there is something else to be done."

"I suppose it would be an expensive volume to bring out?" Vincent suggested inquiringly.

"Oh, yes, yes," the old man said—and now he had relinquished that rhapsodical strain, and had assumed his usual dignified, not to say grandiose, demeanour. "The drawings must be done by the first artists; they must not fall below the poetic pitch of the old ballads and the still older airs. It would be an expensive book to bring out, no doubt; but then it would be a noble undertaking; it would be a sumptuous and valuable work. I should think, now," he went on, reflectively, "that there ought to be a large paper edition—and perhaps five guineas would not be too much to charge—quarto, I mean—quarto—and five guineas for such a handsome volume mightn't be too much—"

"Five guineas?" repeated Vincent. "Well, sir, if you choose to bring out the book by subscription, I will undertake to get you fifty subscribers for that edition." And then he added recklessly, "A hundred—I will assure you a hundred subscribers!"

"No, Mr. Harris," said Maisrie, and she addressed herself in a more direct manner than she had ever yet done to the young man. "It is not to be thought of. My grandfather has work to do that he must finish before entertaining any other schemes. It would be simply wasting time to begin and arrange about another book."

He felt himself silenced and humbled, he hardly knew why. Had she construed his proffered assistance into an offer of charity, and resented it accordingly? But he could find no trace of offended pride in the refined and gentle features when next he ventured to look at her. She had said her say; and that was enough. And her grandfather seemed to know she was in the right; nothing further was mentioned about the new proposal—at least at this particular time. Dessert had come; and the business of choosing from among those abundant fruits made a kind of break.

When at length they were about to depart, there was no confusion about the bill, for Vincent intimated to the old man that he had already arranged about that; and Mr. Bethune seemed satisfied, while Maisrie had passed on in front and did not hear. She was very light-hearted and talkative as they walked away home. Her protest against the proposed publication, if it showed a little firmness at the time, had left no pained feeling behind it; she was now as blithe as a bird; to Vincent

she seemed to shed a radiance around her, as if she were some supernatural being, as she passed through those twilight streets. Once she said something in French—in Canadian French—to her grandfather; and the young man thought that never in all his life had he heard anything so sweet and fascinating as the soft and blurred sound of the *r's*. He was to hear a little more of that Canadian French on this evening. When they reached their lodgings, the old gentleman again asked his young friend to come in for a little while; the temptation was too great; he yielded; and followed them up into the dusky small parlour.

"Now we will have a serious smoke," said George Bethune, with decision, as he took down his long clay pipe. "A cigarette after dinner is a mere frivolity. Maisrie, lass, bring over that box of cigars for Mr. Harris."

But Mr. Harris firmly declined to smoke, even as he had declined to take any wine; what was he going to sacrifice next as a subtle tribute to the exalted character of this young creature? Maisrie Bethune seemed hardly to understand, and was a little surprised; but now she had to go away upstairs, to lay aside her things: so the two men were left alone, to chat about the affairs of the day until her return.

When she came down again, her grandfather said—

"Sing something, Maisrie."

"You know I can't sing, grandfather, but I never refuse you, for it is not of any use," said she, contentedly, as she took the violin out of its case. "But Mr. Harris has had enough of Scotch songs this evening. I must try something else. And perhaps you may have heard the air in Canada," she added, addressing the young man from out of the partial darkness.

And now what was this new enchantment she was about to disclose and practise? In plain truth, she had very little voice; but he did not notice that; it was the curiously naive, and simple, and sincere expression of tone that thrilled through his heart, as she proceeded to recite rather than to sing the well-known "*C' était une frégate*," the violin aiding her with its low and plaintive notes:

C' était une frégate
(Mon joli cœur de rose)
Dans la mer a touché
(Joli cœur d'un rosier).

And here again were those softly slurred *r's*—not sharply trilled,

as in the English fashion—but gentle and half-concealed, as it were. The simple story proceeded—

*Y avait une demoiselle
(Mon joli cœur de rose)
Su' l' bord d' la mer pleurait,
(Joli cœur d' un rosier).*

*—Dites-moi donc, la belle,
(Mon joli cœur de rose)
Qu' a' vous à tant pleurer ?
(Joli cœur d' un rosier).*

*—Je pleur' mon anneau d' or,
(Mon joli cœur de rose)
Dans la mer est tombé,
(Joli cœur d' un rosier).*

Then he asks the weeping damsel what she would give to any one who would find for her her ring of gold that has fallen into the sea.

*—Je suis trop pauvre fille,
(Mon joli cœur de rose),
Je ne puis rien donner,
(Joli cœur d' un rosier).*

*Qu' mon cœur en mariage
(Mon joli cœur de rose)
Pour mon anneau doré
(Joli cœur d' un rosier).*

But the young man sitting there in the twilight hardly heard further than that. The phrase '*qu' mon cœur en mariage*' had something more beautiful in it than even the soft sound of the *r*'s as she pronounced them; it dwelt in his heart with a mysterious charm; even as she went on to tell how the bold gallant who dived for the ring of gold was drowned, what he still seemed to hear was "*Je ne puis rien donner, qu' mon cœur en mariage*;" and when she had finished, and there was silence, he did not speak; there was a kind of bewilderment in the tones of her voice; and he could not offer her commonplace thanks.

"Now I am going to light the gas," she said, cheerfully, as she laid aside her violin, "and, grandfather, you can challenge Mr. Harris to a game of chess, or draughts, or dominoes, whichever he likes best, so that I may get to my work, for it cannot always be playtime."

And so it was that, when the gas had been lit, she returned to her own corner and to her needlework, while her grandfather and Vincent took to dominoes, the old man having his hot

water and whisky brought to him to accompany his second pipe. Dominoes is a mechanical game; you can play well enough even if there is the refrain of a song ringing through your memory; the young man did not care who won; and, indeed, he had quite forgotten who was the victor as he shortly thereafter made his way south through the lamp-lit streets, with his lips half-trying to re-pronounce that strangely fascinating phrase, "*qu' mon cœur en mariage—qu' mon cœur en mariage.*"

Well, this was but the beginning of a series of evenings, until it came to be understood that these three dined together each night, subsequently returning to old George Bethune's rooms, for a little music or dominoes before parting. Vincent assumed the management of these modest little merry-makings; varied the scene of them as much as possible; and so arranged matters that no financial question came up to ask for Maisrie Bethune's interference. It is true, she sometimes seemed inclined to remain at home, so as to leave the two men greater freedom, perhaps; but he would not hear of that; and his ever increasing intimacy now lent him a franker authority. He was high-handed in his ways: she smiled, and yielded.

At last there came a proposition that was somewhat startling in its boldness. Cunningly he deferred bringing it forward until the very end of the evening, for then he knew that the old gentleman would be more inclined to welcome any gay and audacious scheme, without particularly weighing pros and cons. Accordingly having chosen his opportunity, he informed them that he had been offered the use of a house-boat during the Henley week (which was literally true: he had been offered it—for the sum of £30) and said that he had a great mind to accept if only he could persuade Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter to go down as his guests.

"I understood you to say," he continued, without giving either of them time to reply, "that you had never seen Henley at the regatta-time. But it is a thing you ought to see—it is the prettiest sight in England—it is perfectly unique—there is nothing else like it in the world. And then they make those house-boats so comfortable; it is simply a small floating home; or, on the other hand, you can sit outside, and be in the very midst of all the fun. There is no scramble—no crowd—no hustling—so far as we are concerned; and we shall have our own cook and steward. If you do not care to stay the whole week, we could go down on Tuesday afternoon—the races begin

on Wednesday—and remain for the illuminations and fireworks on Friday night. It would be awfully good-natured of you both; of course I could not think of going down and occupying a house-boat by myself. Now what do you say, Miss Bethune?—I appeal first to you.”

“Yes, what do you say, Maisrie?” the old man said, seeing that his granddaughter hesitated; and then he added with a condescending smile: “A question of dress, is it? I have heard that the costumes at Henley are rather extravagant.”

“Oh, I assure you, no,” the young man protested (he would have sworn that the sky was pea-green if that would have helped.) “They are quite simple summer dresses—light in colour, of course—oh, yes—but quite plain and simple: who would take gorgeous gowns to go boating?”

“Very well, very well,” Mr. Bethune said, with an easy good-nature. “I will answer for both Maisrie and myself: we shall be delighted. Let us know the conditions; let us know what may be expected of us; we are old travellers and ready for anything. And don’t you be over particular about your preparations, my young friend; we can rough it; and indeed I’m afraid of late we’ve been falling into somewhat too luxurious ways. Not that I am an anchorite: no—God forbid; if the present moment commends itself, I welcome it; I see no wisdom in schooling one’s self to bear hardships that may not arise. Yes, I have heard of Henley—the Thames in July—the brilliant company—”

“It is awfully kind of you,” said Vincent, rising, and preparing to go. “I am sure you won’t regret it; it is the very prettiest thing in England. And to-morrow night I will let you know all the arrangements.”

Full of joy was the heart of this young man as he strode away down to Grosvenor Place; and reckless and extravagant were the projects crowding in upon his brain as to how he should play the part of host. For one thing, he had the wherewithal; apart from the allowance given him by his father, an uncle had died leaving him a considerable sum; while his own personal habits were of the most inexpensive kind; so that he had plenty of money—too much money—to spend when any whim entered his head. And now, for the first time, old George Bethune and the fair Maisrie were to be openly and ostensibly his guests; and what was he not going to do in the way of entertaining them? If only he could make sure that Maisrie’s cream-coloured costume would go well with calecolarias?—then

with masses of calceolarias that house-boat would be smothered from stem to stern!

Nor did the knowledge that Mrs. Ellison would very likely be at Henley trouble him one bit. He was not ashamed of this recently-formed friendship; no; rather he was ready to proclaim it to all the world. Supposing Mrs. Ellison, shrewd-eyed as she was, were to come and inspect them, where could she find two more interesting human beings—the old man with his splendid nerve and proud spirit; amidst all his misfortunes, and in his old age, too, still holding his head erect; firm and unyielding as his own Craig-Royston:—the young girl with her pensive and mysterious beauty, her clear-shining timid eyes, her maidenly dignity, her patience with the old man, and persuasive and affectionate guidance? Ashamed of this friendship?—he was more inclined to parade it, to boast of it; he would have scorned himself otherwise. Of course (as he could not hide from himself) Mrs. Ellison might be inclined to speculate upon ulterior motives, and might begin to ask what was to come of all this warmth of friendship and constant association. But any future possibilities Vincent put away even from himself; they were all too wild and strange as yet; he was content with the fascination he found in these pleasant little merry-makings, in the more intimate companionship of the small parlour, in listening, there or elsewhere and always, to Maisrie Bethune's voice. And perhaps it was only the sweetness of that voice, and the softly murmured *r's*, that had vibrated through his heart when she sang "*Je ne puis rien donner, qu' mon cœur en mariage?*" What other charm could lie in so simple a phrase? At all events, he thought he would ask Maisrie to take her violin down to Henley with her just in case Mrs. Ellison should some evening pay a visit to the *White Rose*.

CHAPTER VI.

FAIRY LAND.

It was a soft summer night, cool and fragrant after the heat of the long July day; and here, under an awning in the stern of the house-boat *White Rose*, were George Bethune, his granddaughter Maisrie, and Vincent Harris, looking out upon the

magic scene that stretched away from them on each hand up and down the river. All the dusk was on fire with illuminations; the doors and windows of the house-boats sent forth a dull golden glow; there were coloured lamps, crimson, blue, and orange; there were strings of Chinese lanterns that scarcely moved in the faint stirring of wind; and now and again an electric launch would go by—stealthily and silently—with brilliant festoons of fierce white lights causing it to look like some gigantic and amazing insect irradiating the dark. The smooth surface of the stream quivered with reflections; here and there a rowing boat glided along, with a cool plash of oars; a gondola came into view and slowly vanished—the white-clad gondolier visionary as a ghost. Everywhere there was a scent of flowers; and on board this particular house-boat there was but the one prevailing perfume; for the sole decoration of the saloon consisted of deep crimson roses—a heavy splendour against the white and gold walls. From some neighbouring craft came the tinkle of a banjo; there was a distant hum of conversation; the unseen reeds and waterlilies could be imagined to be whispering in the silence. Among the further woods and meadows there was an occasional moving light; no doubt the campers-out were preparing to pitch their tents.

“Mr. Talkative of Prating-row is hardly wanted here to-night,” old George Bethune was saying, unmindful of his own garrulous habits. “Music is better. What is that they are singing over there, Maisrie?”

“‘The Canadian Boat Song,’ grandfather.”

“Oh, yes, of course. I thought it was familiar. And very pretty it sounds, coming across the water—though I do not know whether the air is modern or old. What I am certain of,” he continued, raising his voice slightly as he usually did when he was about to discourse, “is that the finest national airs are ancient beyond the imagination of man to conceive. No matter when words may have been tacked on to them; the original melodies, warlike, or pathetic, or joyous, were the voice of millions of generations that passed away leaving us only these expressions of what they had felt. And if one could only re-translate them!—if one could put back into speech all the human suffering that found expression in such an air as ‘The Last Rose of Summer,’ wouldn’t that electrify the world? I wonder how many millions of generations must have suffered and wept and remembered ere that piteous cry could have

been uttered; and when I come to Tom Moore's wretched trivialities—"

"Grandfather," interposed Maisrie Bethune, quickly (for there were certain subjects that angered him beyond endurance) "you must not forget to show Mr. Harris that old play you found—with the Scotch airs, I mean—"

"Yes, that is curious," said the old man, yielding innocently. "Curious, is it not, that long before either Burns or Scott was born, a Scotchman named Mitchell should have collected over fifty of the best-known Scotch airs, and printed them, with words of his own; and that he should have chosen for the scene of his play the Borders of the Highlands, so as to contrast the manners and customs of the Highland chieftains and their fierce clansmen with those of the Lowland lairds and the soldiery sent to keep the peace between them. The *Highland Fair* was produced at Drury Lane about 1730, if I remember aright; but I cannot gather whether Ewen and Colin, and Alaster and Kenneth, impressed the Londoners much. To me the book is valuable because of the airs—though I could wish for the original songs instead of Mitchell's—"

Here Maisrie, seeing that her grandfather was started on a safer subject, quietly rose; and at the first pause she said—

"I see some of them are putting out their lights, and that is a hint for me to be off. I suppose we shall be wakened early enough to-morrow morning by the boats going by. Good-night, Mr. Harris! Good-night, grandfather!"

She shook hands with both, and kissed her grandfather; then she passed into the glow of that wonderful rose-palace, and made her way along to the ladies' cabin, into which she disappeared. Vincent now lit a cigar—the first during this day.

But when old George Bethune resumed his monologue, it was neither Highland clans nor Lowland songs that concerned him; it was something that proved to be a good deal more interesting to his patient listener. It was of Maisrie's youth that he spoke, and that in a far more simple and natural way than was his wont. There were no genealogical vauntings, no exalted visions of what she should be when she came in for her rights; there were reminiscences of her earlier years, and of his and her wanderings together; and there was throughout a certain wistfulness in his tone. For once he talked without striving for effect, without trying oratorically to convince himself; and it is to be imagined how entirely Vincent was engrossed by this simple recital. Not that there was any con-

secutive narrative. The young man could only vaguely gather that Maisrie's father had been a railway-engineer; that he had married a young Scotch lady in Baltimore before going out west; that Maisrie had been born in Omaha; that shortly thereafter her mother died; then came the collapse of certain speculations her father had been led into, so that the widower, broken in heart and fortune, soon followed his young wife, leaving their child to the care of her only surviving relative. Whether there were some remains of the shattered fortune, or whether friends subscribed to make up a small fund for them, it appeared that the old man and his granddaughter were not quite penniless; for he took credit to himself that he had spent nearly all their little income, arising from this unspecified source, on Maisrie's education.

"I wish to have her fitted for any sphere to which she might be called," he went on, in a musing kind of way. "And I hope I have succeeded. She has had the best masters I could afford; and something of her teaching I have taken upon myself. But, after all, that is not of the greatest importance. She has seen the world—far more than most of her years; and she has not been spoiled by the contact. I could have wished her, perhaps, to have had more of the companionship of her own sex; but that was not often practicable, in our wandering life. However, she has an intuitive sympathy that stands for much; and if in society—which is not much in our way—she might show herself shy and reserved, well, I, for one, should not complain: that seems to me more to be coveted than confidence and self-assertion. As for outward manner she has never wanted any school-mistress other than her own natural tact and her own refinement of feeling; she is a gentlewoman at heart; rudeness, coarseness, presumption would be impossible to her—"

"The merest stranger can see that," Vincent ventured to say, in rather a low voice.

"And thus so far we have come through the world together," the old man continued, in the same meditative mood. "What I have done I have done for the best. Perhaps I may have erred: what could I tell about the uprearing of a young girl? And it may be that what she is now she is in spite of what I have done for her and with her—who knows such mysteries? As for the future, perhaps it is better not to look to it. She is alone; she is sensitive; the world is hard."

"I know many who would like to be her friends," the young man said, breathlessly.

"Sometimes," old George Bethune continued, slowly and thoughtfully, "I wonder whether I have done my best. I may have built on false hopes—and taught her to do the same. I see young women better equipped for the battle of the world, if it is to come to that. Perhaps I have been selfish too; perhaps I have avoided looking to the time when she and I must in the natural course of things be separated. We have been always together; as one, I might say; the same sunlight has shone on us, we have met the same storms, and not much caring, so long as we were the one with the other. But then—the years that can be granted me now are but few; and she has no kinsman to whom she can go, even to glean in the fields and ask for a pitcher of water. And when I think of her—alone—among strangers—my Maisrie—"

His voice choked—but only for a moment. He suddenly sprang to his feet, and flung his arms in the air, as if he would free himself from this intolerable burden of despondency and doubt.

"Why," said he, in accents of scornful impatience, "have I gone mad, or what pestilent thing is this! *Sursum corda!* We have faced the world together, she and I, and no one has ever yet found us downhearted. 'We've aye been provided for, and sae will we yet': I do not mean as regards the common necessities of life—for these are but of small account—but the deeper necessities of sympathy and hope and confidence. Stand fast, Craig-Royston!—'this rock shall fly, from its firm base as soon as I!' Well, my young friend," he continued, quite cheerfully and bravely, "you have seen me in a mood that is not common with me: you will say nothing about it—to her, especially. She puts her trust in me; and so far, I think, I have not failed her. I have said to her 'Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them'; ill fortune buffets uselessly against 'man's unconquerable mind.' She knows the race she comes of, and the motto of that race: Craig-Royston holds its front! Well, well, now, let me thank you for this beautiful evening; and on her behalf too; she is at the time when the mind should be stored with pleasant memories. Perhaps I have been over-communicative, and made you the victim of idle fears; but there will be no more of that; to-morrow you shall find me in my right mind."

He held out his hand. The young man did not know what to say—there was so much to say! He could only make offer of some further little hospitalities, which Mr. Bethune declined;

then the steward was summoned, to put out the lamps and make other preparations, so that the *White Rose* should fold its petals together, for the slumber of the night. And presently a profound peace reigned from stem to stern; and the last plashing of the oars outside had died away.

But it was not to sleep that Vincent devoted the early hours of this night and morning. His mind was tossed this way and that by all kinds of moods and projects, the former piteous and the latter wildly impracticable. He had never before fully realised how curiously solitary was the lot of these two wanderers, how strange was their isolation, how uncertain was their future. And while the old man's courage and bold front provoked his admiration, he could not help looking at the other side of the shield: what was to become of her, when her only protector was taken from her? He knew that they were none too well off, those two; and what would she do when left alone? But if on the very next day he were to go to Mrs. Ellison and borrow £10,000 from her, which he would have mysteriously conveyed to old George Bethune? He could repay the money, partly by the sacrifice of his own small fortune, and partly by the assigning over of the paternal allowance; while he could go away to Birmingham, or Sheffield, or wherever the place was, and earn his living by becoming Mr. Ogden's private secretary. They need never know from whom this bounty came, and it would render them secure from all the assaults of fortune. Away up there in the Black Country he would think of them; and it would lighten the wearisome toil of the desk if he could imagine that Maisrie Bethune had left the roar and squalor of London, and was perhaps wandering through these very Thames-side meadows, or floating in some white-garnitured boat, under the shade of the willows. There would be rest for the pilgrims at last, after their world-buffetings. And so he lay and dreamed and pitied and planned, until in the window of the small state-room there appeared the first blue-gray of the dawn, about which time he finally fell asleep.

But next morning all was briskness and activity around them—flags flying, coloured awnings being stretched, pale swirls of smoke rising from the stove-pipes, the pic-nickers in the meadows lighting their spirit-lamps for the breakfast tea. The sun was shining brightly, but there was a cool breeze to temper the heat; the surface of the stream was stirred into silver; the willows and rushes were shivering and swaying; a

scent of new-mown hay was in the air. Already there were plenty of craft afloat, on business or on pleasure bent; early visits being paid, or masses of flowers, ferns, and palms being brought along for purchasers. Maisrie was the first to be up and out; then old George Bethune could be heard gaily singing in his state-room, as an accompaniment to his toilet—

“Hey, Jonnie Cope, are ye waukin yet,
And are your drums a-beatin yet,
If ye were waukin, I would wait
To meet Jonnie Cope in the morning?”

Finally, when Vincent, with many apologies for being late, made his appearance outside, he found the old man comfortably seated in the stern-sheets, under the pink and white awning, reading a newspaper he had procured somewhere, while Maisrie was on the upper-deck of the house-boat watering the flowers with a can that she had got from the steward.

And indeed to this young man it appeared a truly wonderful thing that these three, some little while thereafter, in the cool twilight of the saloon, should be seated at breakfast together; they seemed to form a little family by themselves, isolated and remote from the rest of the world. They forgot the crowded Thames outside and the crowded meadows; here there was quiet, and a charming companionship; a band that was playing somewhere was so distant as to be hardly audible. Then the saloon itself was charming; for though the boat was named the *White Rose*, there was a good deal of pale pink in its decorations: the flutings and cornice were pink where they were not gold, and pink were the muslin curtains drawn round the small windows; while the profusion of deep crimson roses all round the long room, and the masses of grapes and pine-apples on the breakfast-table made up a picture almost typical of summer, in the height of its luxuriance and shaded coolness.

“This seems very nice,” said the young host, “even supposing there were no river and no racing. I don’t see why a caravan like this shouldn’t be put on wheels and taken away through the country. There is an idea for you, Mr. Bethune, when you set out on your pilgrimage through Scotland; wouldn’t a moveable house of this kind be the very thing for Miss Bethune and you?—you could set it afloat if you wanted to go down a river, or put it on a lorry when you wanted to take the road.”

“I’m afraid all this luxury would be out of place in ‘Caledonia, stern and wild,’” the old man said. “No, no; these

things are for the gay south. When Maisrie and I seek out the misty solitudes of the north, and the graves of Renwick and Cargill, it will be on foot; and if we bring away with us some little trifle to remind us of Logan's streams and Ettrick's shaws, it will be a simple thing—a bluebell or a bit of yellow broom. I have been thinking that perhaps this autumn we might begin—"

"Oh, no, grandfather," Maisrie interposed at once. "That is impossible. You know you have the American volume to do first. What a pity it would be," she went on, with an insidious and persuasive gentleness which the young man had seen her adopt before in humouring her grandfather, "if some one else were to bring out a book on the same subject before you. You know no one understands it so thoroughly as you do, grandfather; and with your extraordinary memory you can say exactly what you require; so that you could send over and get the materials you want without any trouble."

"Very well, very well," the old man said, curtly. "But we need not talk business at such a time as this."

Now there was attached to the *White Rose* a rowing-boat; and a very elegant rowing-boat it was, too, of varnished pine; and by and bye Vincent proposed to his two guests that they should get into the stern-sheets, and he would take a short pair of sculls, and pull them up to the bridge, to show them the other house-boats, and the people, and the fun of the fair generally.

"But wouldn't you take the longer oars," said Maisrie, looking down into the shapely gig, "and let me have one?"

"Oh, would you like that?" he said, with pleasure in his eyes. "Yes, by all means, if you care to row. It is a light boat though it's long; you won't find it hard pulling. By the way, I hunted about everywhere to get a gondola for you, and I couldn't."

"But who told you I had ever tried an oar in a gondola?" she asked, with a smile.

"Why, you yourself: was I likely to forget it?" he said reproachfully.

And oh! wasn't he a proud young man when he saw this rare and radiant creature—clad all in white she was, save for a bunch of yellow king-cups in her white sailor hat, and a belt of dull gold satin at her waist—when he saw her step down into the boat, and take her place, and put out the stroke oar with her prettily shaped hands. Her grandfather was already in the

stern-sheets, in possession of the tiller-ropes. When they moved off into mid-stream, it was very gently, for the river was already beginning to swarm; and he observed that she pulled as one accustomed to pulling, and with ease; while, as he was responsible for keeping time, they had nothing to be ashamed of as they slowly moved up the course. Indeed, they were only paddling; sometimes they had to call a halt together, when there was a confusion; and this not unwelcome leisure they devoted to an observation of the various crews—girls in the lightest of summer costumes, young men in violent blazers—or to a covert inspection of the other house-boats, with their parterres and festoons of flowers, their huge Japanese sun-shades and tinted awnings, and the brilliant groups of laughing and chatting visitors.

"Oh, Mr. Harris, do look—isn't that a pretty one!" Maisrie exclaimed, in an undertone.

He glanced in the direction indicated, and there beheld a very handsome house-boat, all of rich-hued mahogany, its chief decoration being flowerboxes in blue tiles filled with marguerites. At the same instant he found that a pair of eyes were fixed on him—eyes that were familiar—and the next moment he knew that Mrs. Ellison, from the upperdeck of that mahogany house-boat, was regarding him and his companions with an intense curiosity. But so swift was her scrutiny, and so impassive her face, that ere he could guess at the result of her investigation she had made him a formal little bow and turned away to talk to her friends. Of course, with one hand on the oar he raised his hat with the other: but the effect of this sudden recognition was to leave him rather breathless and bewildered. It is true, he had half expected her to be there; but all the same he was not quite prepared; and—and he was wondering what she was thinking now. However, the officials were beginning to clear the course for the first race; so the gig was run in behind one of the tall white poles; and there the small party of three remained until the rival crews had gone swiftly by, when it was permitted them to return to the *White Rose*.

After luncheon he said he would leave his guests to themselves for a little while, as he wished to pay a visit to a friend he had seen on one of the other house-boats; then he jumped into the gig, made his way along to the *Villeggiatura*, got on board, went up the steps, and found himself among a crowd of people. Mrs. Ellison, noticing him, discreetly left the group she was with, and came to him, taking him in a measure apart.

"Wait a moment, Vin," she said, regarding the young man. "If you wish it—if you prefer it—I have seen nothing."

"What do you mean, aunt!" he said, with some haughty inclination to anger. "Why should I seek any concealment? I want you to come along that I may introduce to you two friends of mine."

Instinctively she seemed to draw back a little—almost as if she were afraid.

"Oh, no, thanks, Vin. No, thanks. Please leave me out."

"Why?" he demanded.

The pretty young widow was embarrassed and troubled; for she knew the fiery nature of young men; and did not want to provoke any quarrel by an unguarded expression.

"Well—it is simply this, you know—they are strangers—I mean—I suppose that neither your father nor any of the family have met them—they seemed somehow like strangers—unusual looking—and—and I shouldn't like to be the first. Leave me out, there's a good boy!"

"Why?" he demanded again.

So she was driven to confession.

"Well, look here, Vin; I may be wrong; but aren't these new friends somehow connected with your being so much away from home of late—with your being in those lodgings? Was it there you made their acquaintance?"

"If you want to know, I saw them first at Lord Musselburgh's," said he with an amazing audacity; for although the statement was literally true, it was entirely misleading.

And apparently it staggered the pleasant-eyed young widow.

"Oh, at Lord Musselburgh's?" said she, with a distinct (but cautious) change of manner. "Oh, really. Lord Musselburgh's. But why should you want to introduce me to them, Vin?"

"Because," said he, "they have never met any member of our family; and as you are the most goodnatured and the prettiest, I want to produce a favourable impression at the outset."

She laughed and was not displeased.

"There are some other qualities that seem to characterise our family—impudence for one," she observed. "Well, come along then, Vin: where are your friends?"

"In a house-boat down there—the *White Rose*."

"The *White Rose*? I noticed it yesterday—very pretty—whose is it?"

"Mine for the present; I rented it for the week," he replied.

"Who are the other members of your party?"

"None—only those two."

But here she paused at the top of the steps; and said in an undertone—

"Really, Vin, this is too much! You, a young man entertaining those two—and no lady chaperon—"

He turned and looked at her, with straight eyes.

"Oh, it's quite right," she said, hastily. "It's quite right, of course—but—but so much *en évidence*—so prominent—people might talk—"

"I never try to hinder people from talking," said he, with a certain scorn. "And if they busy themselves with my small affairs, they are welcome to ring their discoveries from the tops of the steeples. I did not ask anybody's permission when I invited two friends of mine, who had never been to Henley before, to be my guests during the regatta-week."

"Of course not, of course not," she said, gently; "but you are doing it in such a marked way—"

"Come, come, aunt," said he, "it isn't like you to niggle about nothing. You are not a prude; you have too much good-nature—and too much common sense. And I don't want you to go on board the *White Rose* with any kind of prejudice in your mind."

They could not get away just then, however, for the course was being cleared for the next race; so they lingered there until they saw, far away on the open river, two small objects like water-insects, with slender quick-moving legs, coming rapidly along. The dull murmur of the crowd became a roar as the boats drew nearer. Then the needlelike craft shot by, almost neck and neck; and loud were the shouts that cheered this one or that; while straining eyes followed them along to the goal. The sudden wave of enthusiasm almost immediately subsided; the surface of the river was again being crowded by the boats that had been confined behind the white poles; and now Vincent got his fair companion down into the gig and, with some little difficulty and delay, rowed her along to the *White Rose*.

He was very anxious as he conducted her on board; but he affected a splendid carelessness.

"Mr. Bethune," said he, "let me introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Ellison—Miss Bethune, Mrs. Ellison; now come away

inside, and we'll get some tea or strawberries or something—racing isn't everything at Henley—”

“It isn't anything at all, as far as I have seen,” said Mrs. Ellison, goodhumouredly, as she followed her nephew into the saloon. “Well, this is very pretty—very pretty indeed—one of the simplest and prettiest—so cool-looking. I hear this is your first visit to Henley,” she continued addressing the old man, when they had taken their seats: Vincent meanwhile, bustling about to get wine and biscuits and fruit, for the steward had gone ashore.

“It is,” said he, “and I am glad that my granddaughter has seen it in such favourable circumstances. Although she has travelled much, I doubt whether she has ever seen anything more charming, more perfect in its kind. We missed the Student's Serenade at Naples last year; but that would have been entirely different, no doubt; this is a vast water picnic, among English meadows, at the fairest time of the year, and with such a brilliancy of colour that the eye is delighted in every direction.”

He was self-possessed enough (whatever their eagerly solicitous young host may have been); and he went on, in a somewhat lofty and sententious fashion, to describe certain of the great public festivals and spectacles he had witnessed in various parts of the world. Mrs. Ellison was apparently listening as she ate a strawberry or two; but in reality she was covertly observing the young girl (who sate somewhat apart) and taking note of every line and lineament of her features, and even every detail of her dress. Vincent brought Mr. Bethune a tumbler of claret with a lump of ice in it; he drained a deep draught; and resumed his story of pageants. Maisrie was silent, her eyes averted: the young man asked himself whether the beautiful profile, the fine nostrils, the sensitive mouth, would not plead for favour, even though she did not speak. It seemed a thousand pities that her grandfather should be in this garrulous mood. Why did not Mrs. Ellison turn to the girl direct?—he felt sure there would be an instant sympathy between those two, if only Maisrie would appeal with her wonderful, true eyes. What on earth did anyone want to know about the resplendent appearance of the White Cuirassiers of the Prussian Guard, as they rode into Prague a week or two after the battle of Königgrätz, with their dusty and swarthy faces and their copper-hued breastplates lit up by the westering sun?

But, on the other hand, Mrs. Ellison was not displeased by

this one-sided conversation; quite the contrary; she wanted to know all about these strange people with whom her nephew had taken up; and the more the old man talked the better she resented the intervention of a race which Master Vin dragged them all away to see; and as soon as it was over—they were now seated in the stern-sheets of the boat—she turned to Mr. Bethune with a question.

"I understand," she said, in a casual sort of way, "that you know Lord Musselburgh?"

At this Maisrie looked up startled.

"Oh, yes," said her grandfather, in his serene and stately fashion. "Oh, yes. A most promising young man—a young man who will make his mark. Perhaps he is riding too many hobbies; and yet it might not be prudent to interfere and advise; a young man in his position is apt to be hotheaded—"

"Mrs. Ellison," interposed Maisrie, "we are only slightly acquainted with Lord Musselburgh—very slightly indeed. The fact is, he was kind enough to interest himself in a book, that my grandfather hopes to bring out shortly."

"Oh, really," said the pretty widow with a most charming smile (perhaps she was glad of this opportunity of talking to the young lady herself) "and may I ask—pardon my curiosity—what the subject is."

"It is a collection of poems written by Scotchmen living in America and Canada," answered Maisrie, quite simply. "My grandfather made the acquaintance of several of them, and heard of others; and he thought that a volume of extracts, with a few short biographical notices, might be interesting to the Scotch people over here. For it is about Scotland that they mostly write, I think, and of their recollections—perhaps that is only natural."

"And when may we expect it?" was the next question.

Maisrie turned to her grandfather.

"Oh, well," the old man made answer, with an air of magnificent unconcern, "that is difficult to say. The book is not of such great importance; it may have to stand aside for a time. For one thing, I should most likely have to return to the other side to collect materials; whereas, while we are here in the old country there are so many opportunities for research in other and perhaps more valuable directions, that it would be a thousand pities to neglect them. For example, now," he continued, seeing that Mrs. Ellison listened meekly, "I have

undertaken to write for my friend Carmichael of the *Edinburgh Chronicle* a series of papers on a branch of our own family that attained to great distinction in the Western Isles during the reign of the Scotch Jameses—the learned Beaton of Islay and Mull.”

“Oh, indeed,” said Mrs. Ellison, affecting much interest.

“Yes,” resumed old George Bethune, with much dignified complacency, “it will be a singular history if ever I find time to trace it out. The whole of that family seem to have been regarded with a kind of superstitious reverence; all their sayings were preserved; and even now, when a proverb is quoted in the Western Isles, they add, ‘as the sage of Mull said’ or ‘as the sage of Islay said.’ For *ullamh*, I may inform you, Mrs.—Mrs.—”

“Ellison,” she said, kindly.

“Mrs. Ellison—I beg your pardon—my hearing is not what it was. *Ullamh*, in the Gaelic tongue means at once a Doctor of Medicine and a wise man—”

“They distinguish between the terms in English,” put in Vincent.

“—and doctors most of them appear to have been,” continued the old man, quite oblivious of interruption: indeed he seemed to be reading something out of his memory, rather than addressing particularly any one of his audience. “A certain Hector Beaton, indeed, got a considerable grant in Islay for having cured one of the Jameses when all the Edinburgh Faculty had failed; and I myself have seen in the island of Iona the tombstone of the last of the Mull doctors of the name, who died so late as 1657. *Hic jacet Johannes Betonius Maclenorum familiæ Medicus*: no doubt there must be some mention of those Beaton in the archives of the various families of Maclean in Mull. Then I daresay I could get a drawing of the tombstone—though I can remember the inscription well enough. The coat of arms, too, has the three mascles of the Bethunes—”

“Of the Bethunes?—then you are of the same family?” said Mrs. Ellison, this time with a little genuine curiosity.

But the interruption had the effect of rousing him from his historical reverie.

“I would rather say,” he observed, with some stiffness, “that they were originally of our family. The Norman de Bethune would easily be changed into the Scotch Beaton.”

“Then there was Mary Beaton, of the Queen’s Maries,” Mrs. Ellison suggested.

But at this the old man frowned: he did not wish any fictitious characters brought into these authentic annals.

"An idle tale—a popular rhyme," said he. "There is no real foundation for the story of Mary Hamilton that ever I could get hold of. Of course there may have been a Mary Beaton at Queen Mary's court—what more likely?—and Mary Beaton would come trippingly to the popular tongue in conjunction with Mary Seton; but that is all. It is with real people, and important people, I shall have to deal when I get to the Advocates Library in Edinburgh."

"Oh, yes, certainly—of course—I quite understand," she said, humbly. And then she rose. "Well, I must be getting back to my friends, Vin, or they will think I have slipped over the side and been drowned."

"But won't you stay to dinner, aunt?" said he. "I wish you would!"

"Oh, no, thanks, I really couldn't," she answered with a sudden earnestness that became more intelligible to him afterwards. "I couldn't run away from my hosts like that." Then she turned to Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter. "By the way," she said, "Lord Musselburgh is coming down to-morrow—merely for the day—and he will be on board the *Villeggiatura*. Would you all of you like to come along and have a look over the boat; or shall I send him to pay you a visit here?"

It was Maisrie who replied—with perfect self-composure.

"Our acquaintance with Lord Musselburgh is so very slight, Mrs. Ellison," said she, "that it would hardly be worth while making either proposal. I doubt whether he would even remember our names."

Whereupon the young widow bade good-bye to Maisrie with a pretty little smile; the old gentleman bowed to her with much dignity; and then she took her seat in the stern of the gig, while her nephew put out the sculls. When they were well out of hearing, Mrs. Ellison said—with a curious look in her eyes of perplexity and half-frightened amusement—

"Vin, who is that old man?"

"Well, you saw, aunt," he made answer.

"Oh, yes, I saw. I saw. But I am none the wiser. I could not make him out at all. Sometimes I thought he was a self-conceited old donkey, who was simply gabbling at random; and again he seemed really to believe what he was saying, about his connection with those Beatons and de Bethunes and the Scotch kings. But there's something behind it all, Vin; I

tell you there is; and I can't make it out. There's something mysterious about him—"

"There's nothing mysterious at all!" he exclaimed impatiently.

"But who is he, then?" she persisted. "What is he? Where is his family? Where are his relatives?"

"I don't think he has any, if it comes to that, except his granddaughter," her nephew replied.

"What does he do, then? How does he exist?"

He was beginning to resent this cross-examination; but yet he said civilly enough—

"I am not in the habit of making inquiries about the income of everyone I meet; but I understand they have some small sum of money between them—not much: and then he has published books; and he writes for the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*. Is that enough?"

"Where does he live?"

"In Mayfair."

"I don't believe a word of it!" she said, and she even ventured to laugh in a half-embarrassed way. "I believe he dwells in a cave—he is a troglodyte—he comes out at dusk—and wanders about with a lantern and a pickaxe. Really, when I looked at his shaggy eyebrows, and his piercing eyes, and his venerable beard, I thought he must be some Druid come to life again—or perhaps one of those mythical island-doctors surviving from the fourteenth century—"

"At all events, aunt," Vincent said, with an ominous distinctness of tone, "his age and what he has come through might procure for him a little respect. It isn't like you to jeer and jibe simply because a man is old—"

"My dear boy, I am not jibing and jeering!" she protested. "I tell you I am puzzled. There's something about that old man I can't make out."

"How could you expect to understand anybody—in half-an-hour's talk at Henley Regatta!" he said, indignantly. "I gave you the opportunity of getting to know them both, if only you had come along this evening, and spent some time with them. I am not aware that either of them wants to conceal anything. They are not ashamed of their poverty. Perhaps the old man talks too much: you, at least, pretended to find what he said interesting. And as for the girl, no doubt she was silent: she isn't used to be stared at and examined by critical and unsympathetic eyes."

The young widow elevated her brows: here was something unexpected!

"Vin Harris," she said, solemnly, "are you quarrelling with me because—because I am not glamourised? Is it as bad as that? If so, then I am extremely glad I did *not* accept your invitation this evening. I am compromised far enough already—"

"What do you mean by compromised?" he demanded.

But just at this moment she had to call to him to look out, for they had almost arrived at the *Villeggiatura*. He glanced over his shoulder, pulled a stroke with his right oar, shipped the other, and then, having gripped the stern of the house-boat, he affixed the painter of the gig, and, letting her back fall into the stream, returned to the thwart he had occupied.

"I wish to ask you, aunt," said he, in a sufficiently stiff and formal tone, "how you consider you have been compromised through meeting any friends of mine."

"Oh," said she, half inclined to laugh, yet a little bit afraid to, "don't ask me. It isn't as serious as that—I mean, I didn't think you would take it seriously. No doubt it's all right, Vin, your choosing your own friends; and I have nothing to say against them; only I would rather you left me out, if you don't mind. You see, I don't know your intentions—"

"Supposing I have none?" he demanded again.

"Well, no one can say what may happen," the young widow persisted; "and I should not like to be appealed to—Now, now, Vin, don't be so passionate!—have I said a single word against your new friends? Not one. I only confess that I'm a selfish and comfort-loving woman, and I don't wish to be drawn into any family strife. There may be no family strife? Very well; so much the better. But my having no further acquaintance with Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune—my having no knowledge of them whatever, for it practically comes to that—cannot injure them; and leaves me free from responsibility. Now, don't quarrel with me, Vin; for I will not allow it; I have been talking common sense to you—but I suppose that is what no man of twenty-five understands."

He hauled up the gig to the stern of the house-boat as an intimation that she could step on board when she chose.

"There," said she, as she gave him her hand in parting, "I see I have offended you; but what I have said has been for your sake as well as mine."

Well, he was vexed, disappointed, and a little inclined to

be angry. But all that darkness fled from his spirit—he forgot all about Mrs. Ellison’s friendly monitions—he had no care for any speculations as to the future—when he was back again in the *White Rose*, sitting by Maisrie Bethune, he and she together looking abroad on the gay crowd, and the boats, and the trembling willows, and the slow-moving skies now growing warmer with the afternoon sun. Then, when the last of the races was over, came dinner; and as twilight stole over the river and the meadows, the illuminations began, the rows of coloured lanterns showing one after the other, like so many fire-flies in the dusk. Of course they were sitting outside now—on this placid summer night—in fairyland.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAIRE FONTAINE.

BUT something far more strange and wonderful happened to him the next morning; and that was his first *tête-à-tête* conversation with Maisrie Bethune. It was quite unexpected, and even unsought; nay, when he stepped outside and found that she was alone on deck, he would have shrank back, had that been possible, rather than break in upon her solitude. For even here at Henley, during the regatta-time, which may be regarded as the High Festival of Joyance and Flirtation, there was no thought of pretty and insidious love-making in this young man’s head or heart. There was something mysteriously remote and reserved about this isolated young creature, whose very beauty was of a strangely pensive and wistful kind. Even the gentle self-possession and the wisdom beyond her years she showed at times seemed to him a pathetic sort of thing; he had a fancy that during her childhood she never had had the chance of playing with young children.

But it was too late to retreat; and indeed she welcomed him with a pleasant smile as she bade him good morning. It was he who was embarrassed. He talked to her about the common things surrounding them, while anxiously casting about for something better fitting such a rare opportunity. And at last he said—

"Yes, I am sure your grandfather and I get on very well. And I have been wondering whether, when you and he make that pilgrimage through Scotland, he would let me accompany you."

In her beautiful and child-like eyes there was a swift flash of joy that made his heart leap, so direct and outspoken an expression it was of her gladness to think of such a thing; but instantly she had altered her look, and a faint flush of colour had overspread her face—the pale wild-rose had grown pink.

"Your way of travelling and ours are so different," she said, gently.

"Oh, but," said he, with eagerness, "you don't understand how the idea of a long wandering on foot has fascinated me: why, that would be the whole charm of it! You don't know me at all yet. You think I care for the kind of thing that prevails here—that I can't get on without pine-apples and chairs with gilt backs? Why—but I don't want to talk about myself at all: if you would let me come with you on that pilgrimage you would find out a little. And what an opportunity it will be, to go with your grandfather: history, poetry, and romance all brought together: Scotland will be a wonderful country for you before you have done with it. And—and—you see—I have gone on pedestrian excursions before—I have a pretty broad back—I can carry things. You might engage me as porter; for even when you send your luggage on, there will be a few odds and ends to fill a knapsack with; and I can tramp like any gaberlunzie."

She smiled a little, and then said more seriously—

"I am glad to have the chance of speaking to you about that scheme of my grandfather's; because, Mr. Harris, you must try to dissuade him from it as much as possible."

"Dissuade him?"

"Yes," said she, quietly. "You must have seen how completely my grandfather lives in a world of imagination, and how one thing captivates him after another, especially if it is connected with Scotland and Scottish song. And I have no doubt he would write a beautiful book about such a tour as that; for who knows more about all the places and the legends and ballads? It would be a pleasure for me too—I have dreamed of it many a time. But it is impossible for the present; and it will be a kindness to me, Mr. Harris, if you will not encourage him in it. For the fact is," she continued, with a little embarrassment, "my grandfather has undertaken to write some-

thing else—and—and he is under personal obligations about it—and he must not be allowed to forget them.”

“Oh, yes, I quite understand,” Vincent said. “I have heard of that volume about the Scotch poets in America. Well, you know what your grandfather says, that he would have to go to the other side to collect materials; while, being here in this country just now, he might as well take you to those scenes and places that would make up another book, to be written subsequently. However, I have no doubt you are right. The possibility of my going along with you two on such an excursion has been a wonderful thing for me to speculate on; but whatever you wish, that is enough. I am against the Scotch trip now, so far as I have any right to speak.”

She was looking at him inquiringly, and yet diffidently, as if she were asking herself how far she might confide in him.

“Perhaps you have not noticed it, Mr. Harris,” she added, still regarding him, “but my grandfather has a strange faculty for making himself believe things. I daresay, if he only planned the American book, he could convince himself that he had written it, and so got rid of those—those obligations. Well, you will help me, will you not?—for I am anxious to see it done; and he may say I am too young and too ignorant to give advice—as I am—”

“Why,” said Vincent, almost indignantly, “do you think I cannot see how you guide and lead him always, and with such a tact and wisdom and gentleness as I never beheld anywhere!”

Maisrie flushed downright red this time; but she sought to conceal her confusion by saying quickly—

“Then again you must not misunderstand me, Mr. Harris; you must not think I am saying anything against my grandfather; I am only telling you of one little peculiarity he has. Saying anything against him!—I think I could not well do that; for he has been goodness itself to me since ever I can remember anything. There is nothing he would not sacrifice for my sake; sometimes it is almost painful to me to see an old man, who should be the petted one and the cared for, so ready to give up his own wants and wishes, to please a mere girl who is worthy of no consideration whatever. And consideration is not the word for what I have received from my grandfather always and always; and if I could forget all he has done for me and been to me—if I could be so ungrateful as to forget all those years of affection and sympathy and constant kindness—”

She never finished the sentence. He fancied her eyes were moist as she turned her head away; anyhow he dared not break in upon the silence; these confidences had been sacred things. And indeed there was no opportunity for further speech on this subject; for presently old George Bethune made his appearance, radiant, buoyant, high-spirited, with a sonorous stanza from Tannahill to greet the awakening of the new day.

Now no sooner had Lord Musselburgh arrived on board the *Villeggiatura* on the same morning than Mrs. Ellison went to him and told him all her story, which very much surprised him, and also concerned him not a little, for it seemed as though he was in a measure responsible for what had happened to Vincent.

"My dear Mrs. Ellison," said he, "I can assure you of one thing: it is quite true that your nephew was in the room when Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter called on me, but I am positively certain that there was no introduction and that he did not speak a single word to them there. How he got to know them I cannot imagine; nor how they could have become so intimate that he should ask them to be his guests down here at Henley. And his sole guests, you say?—Yes, I admit, it looks queer. I hope to goodness there is no kind of entanglement—"

"Oh," said Mrs. Ellison, in sudden alarm; "don't imagine anything from what I have told you! There may be nothing in it: he as good as declared there was nothing in it: and he is so fiery and sensitive—on this one point—why, that is the most serious feature of it all! He looks you straight in the face, and dares you to suspect anything. But really—really—to have those two companions—and no others—on a house-boat at Henley: it is a challenge to the world!"

"Looks rather like it," said Lord Musselburgh; and then he added: "Of course you know that Vin has always been a Quixotic kind of chap—doing impossible things if he thought them right—and all that sort of thing. But it's very awkward just at this moment. There must be some powerful attraction, of one kind or another, to have made him give himself over so completely to these new friends; for he has not been near me of late; and yet here I have in my pocket a letter that concerns him very closely, if only he would pay attention to it. I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Ellison, for you are discretion itself—"

"I think you may trust me, Lord Musselburgh," she said, with a smile.

"Very well, then," said he, lowering his voice. "I hear that there will be a vacancy at Mendover—certainly at the next General Election, but more probably much sooner; old Gosford has become such a confirmed hypochondriac that he will hardly leave his room; and his constituents are grumbling as much as they dare—for he has got money, you know, and the public park he gave them wants further laying out, and statues, and things. Very well; now I have in my pocket a darkly discreet letter from the Committee of the Mendover Liberal Association asking me to go down and deliver an address at their next meeting, and hinting that if I could bring with me an acceptable candidate—"

He paused, and for a second a cynical but perfectly good-humoured laugh appeared in his eyes.

"My dear Mrs. Ellison," said he, "I am deeply grateful. I thought you might express some astonishment at my being consulted in so important an affair. But the fact is, I, also, am expected to do something for that park; and perhaps this invitation was only a little hint to remind me of my local responsibilities. However, that is how the case stands; and I had thought of taking your nephew down with me—"

"A vacancy at Mendover," said Mrs. Ellison, in awe-struck tones, "where you are simply everybody! Oh, Lord Musselburgh, what a chance for Vin!"

"And then, you know," continued the young peer, "I want to bring him out as a Tory Democrat, for that is a fine, bewildering sort of thing, that provokes curiosity: you call yourself a Tory and can be as revolutionary as you like, so that you capture votes all round. Why, I've got Vin's programme all ready for him in my pocket: a graduated income-tax, free education, leasehold enfranchisement, compulsory insurance, anything and everything you like except disestablishment—disestablishment won't work at Mendover. Now, you see, Mrs. Ellison, if I could get Vin properly coached, he has all the natural fervour that unhappily I lack; and after I had made my few little jokes which they kindly take for a speech, I could produce him and say 'Here, now, is the young politician of the new generation; here's your coming man; this is the kind of member the next quarter-of-a-century must return to the House of Commons.' But if there is any Delilah in the way—"

Mrs. Ellison crimsoned

"No, Lord Musselburgh," she said. "No. You need have no fear."

However, she seemed perturbed—perhaps in her anxiety that her nephew should not miss this great opportunity. Presently she said—

"Tell me, what do you know of this old man?—I can't make him out at all."

"I? I know nothing, or next to nothing," he said, lightly, as he gazed abroad on the busy river. "I remember Vin asking me the same question—I suppose out of curiosity about the girl. My recollection of her is that she was extremely pretty—refined looking—lady-like, in fact——"

"She is, indeed," said Mrs. Ellison, with decision, "and that is what makes the situation all the more dangerous—assuming, of course, that there is any ground for one's natural suspicions. No, Vin is the last man in the world to be captured by any vulgar adventuress; he is at once too fastidious and too proud. But then, you see, he is well known to be the son of a very wealthy man; and there might be a design—" She hesitated for a moment: then she said, half impatiently: "Lord Musselburgh, tell me how you came to know this old man: he could not have sprung out of the earth all of a sudden."

He told her, as briefly as might be.

"That was all?" she repeated, eyeing him shrewdly.

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"What do you mean? That is really all I know of the old gentleman: isn't that what you asked?"

"But was that the whole of the interview, if I may be so impertinent as to inquire?" she demanded again.

"Oh, yes, it was," Lord Musselburgh said; and then he added, indifferently: "Of course I subscribed something towards the publication of a book he mentioned—he had written to me before about the project."

"Oh, there was money?" she said.

A slight tinge on Lord Musselburgh's forehead showed that he had not intended to make this admission.

"Oh, nothing—a trifle—it is usual when a book is coming out by subscription."

Mrs. Ellison sat silent for a little while: there was plenty going on on the river to interest her companion. Then by-and-by she said slowly—

"Well, I had intended to keep clear of these new friends of Vin's. I thought it would be more prudent for me to know nothing. It is true, I was introduced to them yesterday afternoon; but I wished that to be all; I thought I would rather withdraw; and let things take their course. But I don't know that that would be honest and right. Vin is a young man with many fine and noble qualities—perhaps a little too fine and noble for the ordinary work-a-day world; and I think he ought to have the benefit of my sadly-earned experience and callous nature—"

Lord Musselburgh laughed: he did not take her too seriously.

"He is my own boy," she continued, "I would do anything for him. And I'm not going to let him be entrapped—if that is what all this means. I know he is very angry with me just now; probably he would not speak to me if he were to meet me this minute; but that won't prevent my speaking to him. I'm going to put my pride in my pocket, Lord Musselburgh. I'm going to find out something more about this picturesque old gentleman, who talks so grandly about the Beatons, and the de Bethunes, and their coats of arms, and who accepts a £10 note—or perhaps only a £5 note?—on account of a book that is not yet published. And if there is any sort of scheme on foot for getting hold of the son of so notoriously wealthy a man as Harland Harris, then I want to make a little inquiry. Yesterday Vin indignantly complained that I was prejudiced, and that I had no right to form any opinion about those friends of his because I would not go along and dine with him and them last evening. Very well, I will go to him, and make up the quarrel, and ask him to repeat the invitation for this evening—"

"For this evening?" repeated Lord Musselburgh, in tones of deep disappointment. "You don't mean you are going to leave all your friends here and go and dine somewhere else?"

"If I can procure an invitation. It is my duty. I'm not going to let my boy be made a fool of, even if I have to sacrifice a little of my own personal comfort."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Lord Musselburgh, gloomily, "but I did not bargain for your going away like that on the only evening I shall be here. If I had known—"

He was on the point of saying he would not have come down: but that would have been too bold an avowal. He suddenly hit upon another happy suggestion.

"You said that Vin had only those two on board with him? Well, if he asks you to dine with him, won't he ask me too?"

Mrs. Ellison laughed, and shook her head.

"No, no. Another stranger would put them on their guard. I must manage my Private Investigation all by myself. But you need not look so disconsolate. There are some really nice people here, as you'll find out by-and-by; and the Drexel girls are driving over from Great Marlow—they are Americans, so you will be properly appreciated: they will try their best to make you happy."

"How late shall you stay on board Vin's boat?" he asked, heedless of these smaller attractions.

"I shall be back here by ten—perhaps by half-past nine."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes, it is—ten at latest."

"Otherwise I should go back to town in the afternoon," said he, frankly.

"What nonsense!" the young widow exclaimed (but she did not seem resentful). "Well, now I must go along to the *White Rose*, and make my peace, and angle for an invitation; and then, if I get it, I must concoct my excuses for Mrs. Lawrence. Anyhow I shall be on board the *Villeggiatura* all the afternoon; and then I hope to have the pleasure of introducing you to Louie Drexel—that is the young lady I have designed for Vin, when he has shaken off those adventurers and come to his right mind."

Almost immediately thereafter Mrs. Ellison had secured a boatman to pull her along to the *White Rose*; and as she drew near, she perceived that Maisrie Bethune was alone in the stern of the house-boat, standing upright on the steering-thwart, and with both hands holding a pair of field-glasses to her eyes—an unconscious attitude that showed the graceful figure of the girl to the best advantage. The observant visitor could also remark that her costume was simplicity itself: a blouse of white soft stuff, with wide sleeves and tight cuffs; a belt of white silk round her waist; and a skirt of blue serge. She wore no head-covering; and her neatly-braided hair caught several soft-shining hues from the sun—not a wonder and glory of hair, perhaps (as Vin Harris would have deemed it), but very attractive all the same to the feminine eye, and somehow suggestive of girlhood, and making for sympathy. And then, when a "Good-morning!" brought round a startled face and a

proud, clear look that was nothing abashed or ashamed, Mrs. Ellison's conscience smote her that she had made use of the word adventuress, and bade her wait and see.

"Good-morning!" Maisrie Bethune answered; and there came a touch of colour to the fine and sensitive features as she knew that the young matron was regarding her with a continuation of the curiosity of the preceding afternoon.

"Have the gentlemen deserted you? Are you all alone?" Mrs. Ellison said.

"Oh, no; they are inside," was the response. "Would you like to see Mr. Harris? Shall I call him?"

"If you would be so kind!"—and therewith Maisrie disappeared into the saloon, and did not return.

It was Vincent that came out—with terrible things written on his brow.

"Don't look at me like that, Vincent Harris!" Mrs. Ellison exclaimed, half-laughing and half-annoyed. "What have I done? It is you who are so hasty and inconsiderate. But I've come to make it all up with you; and to ask you to ask me to dine with you to-night."

"No, thank you, aunt," he said, civilly enough. "You are very kind; but the fact is you would come with a prejudice; and so you'd better not come at all."

Well, she had to be circumspect; for not only was her own boatman behind her, but there was a possibility of some stray sentence penetrating into the saloon.

"Come," she said, in a sort of undertone, to him; and she had a pretty, coaxing, goodnatured way with her when she chose, "I am not going to allow you to quarrel with me, Vin; and I bring a flag of truce; and honourable proposals. I saw you were offended with me last evening; and perhaps I was a little selfish in refusing your invitation; but you see I confess the error of my ways, for here I am begging you to ask me again."

"Oh, if you put it that way, aunt—"

"Oh, no, I don't put it that way!" she said. "Not if you speak like that. Come, be amiable! I've just been talking to Lord Musselburgh—"

"And, of course, you crammed all your wild ideas into his head!" he exclaimed.

"Whoever heard of poor me having ideas!" she said, with a winning good-humour to which he could not but yield. "It isn't for me to have ideas; but I may have prejudices; and I'm

going to leave them all on board the *Villeggiatura* this evening, if you say yes."

"Of course I say yes—when you are like yourself, aunt," he responded at once, "and I shall be very glad indeed. And what is more," said he, in a still lower tone, "when you have really met—certain people—and when you have to confess that you have been unjust, I don't mean to triumph over you. Not a bit. If you have done any injustice, you know yourself how to make it up—to them. Now that's all right and settled: and I'm really glad you're coming. Seven o'clock; and the dress you've got on."

"Oh, but, mind you," said she, "you don't seem to appreciate my goodness in humbling myself so as to pacify your honourable worship. Do you know what I shall have to do besides? How am I to explain to the Lawrences my running away from their party? And here is Lord Musselburgh come down; and the Drexel girls are expected; so you see what I am doing for you, Vin—"

"You're always good to me, aunt—when you choose to be reasonable and exercise your common-sense—"

"Common-sense!" she retorted, with a malicious laugh in her eyes. Then she said, quite seriously: "Very well, Vin: seven o'clock: that is an excellent hour, leaving us all a nice long evening; for I must get back to the *Villeggiatura* early."

And so that was all well and amicably settled. But Master Vin, though young in years, had not tumbled about the world for nothing; and a little reflection convinced him that his pretty aunt's change of purpose—her abandonment of her resolve to remain discreetly aloof—had not been prompted solely, if at all, by her wish to have that little misunderstanding between him and her removed. That could have been done at any time; a few words of apology and appeal, and there an end. This humble seeking for an invitation which she had definitely refused the day before meant more than that; it meant that she had resolved to find out something further about these strangers. Very well, then, she was welcome: at the same time he was resolved to receive this second visit not as he had received the first. He was no longer anxious about the impression these two friends of his might produce on this the first of his relatives to meet them. She might form any opinion she chose: he was indifferent. Nay, he would stand by them on every point; and justify them; and defy criticism. If he had dared he would have gone to Maisrie and said: "My aunt

is coming to dinner to-night; but I will not allow you to submit yourself to any ordeal of inspection. You shall dress as you like, as carelessly or as neatly as you like; you shall wear your hair hanging down your back or braided up, without any thought of her; you shall be as silent as you wish—and leave her, if she chooses, to call you stupid, or shy, or sulky, or anything else.” And he would have gone to the old man and said: “Talk as much and as long as ever you have a mind; you cannot babble o’ green fields too discursively for me; I, at all events, am sufficiently interested in your claims of proud lineage, in your enthusiasm about Scotland and Scottish song, in your reminiscences of many lands. Be as self-complacent and pompous as you please; fear nothing; fear criticism least of all.” And perhaps, in like manner, he would have addressed Mrs. Ellison herself: “My dear aunt, it is not they who are on their trial, it is you. It is you who have to show whether you have the courage of honest judgment, or are the mere slave of social custom and forms.” For perhaps he, too, had imbibed a little of the “Stand Fast, Craig-Royston!” spirit? Bravado may be catching—especially where an innocent and interesting young creature of eighteen or so is in danger of being exposed to some deadly approach.

Of course this carelessly defiant attitude did not prevent his being secretly pleased when, as seven o’clock drew near, he perceived that Maisrie Bethune had arranged herself in an extremely pretty, if clearly inexpensive costume; and also he was in no wise chagrined to find that Mrs. Ellison, on her arrival, appeared to be in a very amiable mood. There was no need to ask her “O come ye in peace here, or come ye in war?”: her manner was most bland; in particular she was adroitly flattering and fascinating towards old George Bethune, who accepted these little attentions from the charming widow with a grave and consequential dignity. The young host refused to sit at the head of the table; he had the places arranged two and two—Mrs. Ellison, of course, as the greater stranger and the elder woman, on his right, and Maisrie opposite to him. During the general dinner-talk, which was mostly about the crowd, and the races, and the dresses, Mrs. Ellison casually informed her nephew that she had that afternoon won two bets, and also discovered that she and Lord Musselburgh were to meet at the same house in Scotland the coming autumn: perhaps this was the explanation of her extreme and obvious good humour.

And if any deep and sinister design underlay this excessive amiability on her part, it was successfully concealed; meantime all was pleasantness and peace; and the old gentleman, encouraged by her artless confidences, spoke more freely and frankly about the circumstances of himself and his granddaughter than was his wont.

"I see some of the papers are indignant about what they call the vulgar display of wealth at Henley regatta," the young widow was saying, in a very unconcerned and easy fashion; "but I wish those gentlemen would remember that there is such a thing as imputation of motives, and that imputing motives is a common resource of envy. If I have a house-boat, and try to make it as pretty as ever I can, both inside and out, why should that be considered display of wealth—display of any sort? I like nice things and comfortable things around me; I don't mind confessing it; I am a selfish woman——"

"There are some who know better, aunt," her nephew interposed.

"Young gentleman," said she, promptly, "your evidence isn't worth anything, for you have expectations. And I am not to be flattered. I admit that I am a selfish and comfort-loving woman; and I like to see pretty things around me, and an abundance of them; and if I can only have these at the cost of being charged with ostentation and display, very well, I will pay the price. If it comes to that, I never saw anything beautiful or desirable in poverty. Poverty is not beautiful; never was, never is, never will be beautiful; it is base and squalid and sordid; it demeans men's minds, and stunts their bodies. I dare say poverty is an excellent discipline—for the rich, if they would only submit to a six months' dose of it now and again; but it is not a discipline at all for the poor; it is a curse; it is the most cruel and baleful thing in the world, destroying self-respect, destroying hope, ambition, everything. Oh, I know the heresy I'm talking. There's Master Vin's papa: he is never done preaching the divine attributes of poverty; and I have no doubt there are a good many others who would be content to fall down and worship *la bonne déesse de la pauvreté*—on £30,000 a year!"

Master Vin sniggered: he was aware that this was not the only direction in which the principles of the philosopher of Grosvenor Place were somewhat inconsistent with his practice. However, it was old George Bethune who now spoke—as one having experience.

"I quite agree," said he to Mrs. Ellison. "I can conceive of nothing more demoralising to the nature of man or woman than harsh and hopeless poverty, a slavery from which there is no prospect of escape. My granddaughter and I have known what it is to be poor; we know it now; but in our case every day brings possibilities—we breathe a wider air, knowing that at any moment news may come. Then fancy plays her part; and imagination can brighten the next day for us, if the present be dark enough. Hopeless poverty—that is the terrible thing; the weary toil leading to nothing; perhaps the unfortunate wretch sinking deeper and deeper into the Slough of Despond. Maisrie and I have met with trials; but we have borne them with a stout heart; and perhaps we have been cheered—at least I know I have been—by some distant prospect of the Bonnie Mill-dams o' Balloray, and a happier future for us both."

"Balloray?" she repeated, inquiringly.

"Balloray, in Fife. Perhaps you have never heard of the Balloray law-suit, and I will not inflict any history of it upon you at present," he continued, with lofty complaisance. "I was merely saying that poverty is not so hard to bear when there are brighter possibilities always before you. If, in our case, we are barred in law by the Statute of Limitations, there is no Statute of Limitations in the chapter of accidents. And some remarkable instances have occurred. I remember one in which a father, two sons, and a daughter were all drowned at once by the sinking of a ship, and the property went bodily over to the younger branch of the family, who had been penniless for years. It is the unexpected that happens, according to the saying; and so we move from day to day towards fresh possibilities; and who can tell what morning may not bring us a summons to make straight for the Kingdom of Fife? Not for myself do I care; I am too old now; it is for my granddaughter here; and I should pass happily away and contented if I could leave her in sole and undisputed possession of the ancient lands of the Bethunes of Balloray."

What pang was this that shot through Vincent's heart? He suddenly saw Maisrie removed from him—a great heiress—unapproachable—guarded by this old man with his unconquerable pride of lineage and birth. *She* might not forget old friends; but *he*? The Harris family had plenty of money; but they had nothing to add to the fesse between three mascles, *or*, and the otter's head; nor had any of their ancestors, so far as was known, accompanied Margaret of Scotland on her marriage with

the Dauphin of France, or taken arms along with the great Maximilien de Bethune, duc de Sully. In imagination the young man saw himself a lonely pedestrian in Fifeshire, regarding from a distance a vast baronial building set amid black Scotch firs and lighter larches, and not daring even to draw near the great gate with the otter's head in stone over the archway. He saw the horses being brought round to the front entrance—a beautiful white Arab and a sturdy cob: the hall door opens—the heiress of Balloray descends the wide stone steps—she is assisted to mount, and pats that beautiful white creature on the neck. And will she presently come cantering by—her long hair flowing to the winds, as fair as it used to be in the olden days when the shifting lights and mists of Hyde Park gave it ever-varying hues? Can he steal aside somewhere?—he has no desire to claim recognition! She has forgotten the time when, in the humble lodgings she used to sing “*Je ne puis rien donner, qu’ mon cœur en mariage*”; she has wide domains now; and wears an ancient historic name. And so she goes along the white highway, and under the swaying boughs of the beeches, until she is lost in a confusion of green and gold . . .

“And in the meantime,” said Mrs. Ellison (Vincent started: had that bewildering and far-reaching vision been revealed to him all in one brief, breathless second?) “in the meantime, Mr. Bethune, you must derive a great deal of comfort and solace from your literary labours.”

“My literary labours,” said the old man, slowly and absently, “I am sorry to say, are mostly perfunctory and mechanical. They occupy attention and pass the time, however; and that is much. Perhaps I have written one or two small things which may survive me for a year or two; but if that should be so, it will be owing, not to any merit of their own, but to the patriotism of my countrymen. Nay, I have much to be thankful for,” he continued, in the same resigned fashion. “I have been spared much. If I had been a famous author in my younger days, I should now be reading the things I had written then with the knowledge that I was their only reader. I should be thinking of my contemporaries and saying ‘At one time people spoke of me as now they are speaking of you.’ It is a kind of sad thing for a man to outlive his fame; for the public is a fickle-minded creature, and must have new distractions; but now I cannot complain of being forgotten, for I never did anything deserving of being remembered.”

"Grandfather," said Maisrie, "surely it is unfair of you to talk like that! Think of the many friends you have made through your writings."

"Scotch friends, Maisrie, Scotch friends," he said. "I admit that. The Scotch are not among the forgetful ones of the earth. If you want to be made much of," he said, turning to Mrs. Ellison, "if you want to be regarded with a constant affection and gratitude, and to have your writings remembered and repeated, by the lasses at the kirk, by the ploughman in the field, by gentle and simple alike, then you must contrive to be born in Scotland. The Scottish heart beats warm, and is constant. If there is a bit of heather or a blue-bell placed on my grave, it will be by the hand of a kindly Scot."

Dinner over, they went out and sate in the cool twilight and had coffee, while the steward was clearing away within. Mrs. Ellison, faithful to her promise to Lord Musselburgh, said she had not long to stay; but her nephew, having a certain scheme in his mind, would not let her go just yet; and by-and-by, when the saloon had been lit up, he asked her, in a casual kind of fashion, whether before she went she would not like to hear Miss Bethune sing something.

"Oh, I should like it of all things!" she replied instantly, with a reckless disregard of truth.

Maisrie glanced at her grandfather.

"Yes, certainly—why not?" said he.

"Then," said their young host, "I propose we go in to the saloon again; it will be quieter." For there was still a plash of oars on the river, and an echoing call of voices in the meadows beyond.

When they had returned into the saloon, Maisrie took up her violin; and Mrs. Ellison bravely endeavoured to assume an air of interested expectancy. The fact was she disliked the whole proceeding; here would be some mere exhibition of a school-girl's showy accomplishments; she would have to say nice things; and she hated telling lies—when nothing was to be gained. Maisrie made some little apology; but said that perhaps Mrs. Ellison had not heard the *Claire Fontaine*, which is a favourite song of the Canadians. Then she drew her bow across the strings.

Vincent need not have been so anxious. Hardly had Maisrie begun with

"*A la claire fontaine,
M'en allant promener—*"

than Mrs. Ellison's air of forced attention instantly vanished; she seemed surprised; she listened in a wondering kind of way to the low clear tones of the girl's voice that were so curiously sincere and penetrating and simple. Not a schoolgirl's showing off, this; but a kind of speech, that reached the heart.

*"Sur la plus haute branche
Le rossignol chantait.
Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le cœur gai.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."*

Did she notice the soft dwelling on the *r's*, Vincent asked himself; and had she ever heard anything so strangely fascinating? Then the simple pathos of the story—if there was any story—

*"Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le cœur gai;
Tu as le cœur à rire,
Moi je l'ai-t-à pleurer."*

*Tu as le cœur à rire,
Moi je l'ai-t-à pleurer :
J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
Sans l'avoir mérité.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."*

"That is enough," said Maisrie, with a smile, and she laid the violin in her lap. It is too long. You never hear it sung altogether in Canada—only a verse here and there—or perhaps merely the refrain—"

"But is there more?—oh, please sing the rest of it—it is delightful—so quaint, and simple, and charming!" Mrs. Ellison exclaimed; and Master Vin was a proud and glad young man; he knew that Maisrie had all unaided struck home.

The girl took up her violin again, and resumed—

*"J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
Sans l'avoir mérité.
Pour un bouquet de roses
Que je lui refusaï"*

*Pour un bouquet de roses
Que je lui refusai.
Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier."*

*Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier,
Et moi et ma maîtresse
Dans les mem's amitiés.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai !*"

Well, when the singing, if it could be called singing, was over, Mrs. Ellison made the usual little compliments, which nobody minded one way or the other. But presently she had to leave; and while she was being rowed up the river by her nephew she was silent. When they reached the *Villeggiatura* (the people were all outside, amid the confused light of the lanterns in the dusk) she said to him, in a low voice, as she bade him good-bye—

"Vin, let me whisper something to you—a confession. *Claire Fontaine* has done for me. That girl is a good girl. *She* is all right, anyway."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ALARM.

ON a certain still, clear, moonlight night a dog-cart containing two young men was being driven away from the little town of Mendover, out into the wide, white, silent country. The driver was Lord Musselburgh, and he seemed in high spirits, talking to his companion almost continuously, while he kept the stout little cob going at a rattling pace.

"I am more pleased than I can tell you," he was saying. "Quite a triumph! Why, you took to it as a duck takes to water. Of course there's something in having a responsive audience; and you can always get a noble band of patriots to cheer your proposal for a progressive income-tax when not one in ten of them has any income-tax to pay. I'm afraid they weren't quite so enthusiastic about your scheme of compulsory insurance; indeed they seemed a little disappointed and offended; the Champion of the Proletariat was playing it a little low down on them; but a heavily increasing income-tax—oh, yes, that was splendid!—they saw the Rothschilds caught at last,

and had visions of a land in which there shall be no more poor-rates or police-rates, perhaps not even water-rates or gas-rates. But it was your confounded coolness that surprised me—no beating about the bush—walking straight into it—and without preparation, too—”

“I knew what I had to say,” Vincent interposed, with a becoming modesty, “and it seemed simple enough to say it.”

“Yes, and so it is—when you have acquired the knack of forgetting yourself,” said the young nobleman, oracularly. “And that appears to have come naturally to you, my boy. However, this is why I am so particularly pleased with your successful first appearance,” Lord Musselburgh proceeded, as the dog-cart went bowling along the silent, white highway, between the black hedges. “I am about to unfold to you a great idea, Vin—perhaps prematurely, but you will be discreet. The project is mine; but I want help to carry it through; you and I must work together; and years and years hence we shall be recognised as the Great Twin Brethren, who saved the falling fortunes of England.”

Was he in jest or earnest? Vincent, knowing his friend’s sub-cynical habit of speech, listened without interposing a word.

“We shall earn for ourselves a deathless renown, at very little cost—to us; it’s the other people who will have to pay, and we shall have all the glory. Now what I propose is briefly this: I propose to give all those good folk who profess a warm regard for their native country a chance of showing what their patriotism is worth. I don’t want them to fight; there isn’t any fighting going on at present to speak of; and in any case the rich old merchants, and maiden ladies, and portly bishops, and ponderous judges—well, they’d make an awkward squad to drill; but I mean to give them an opportunity of testifying to their affection for the land of their birth; and you, my blazing young Tory-Democrat, if you can speak as freely as you spoke to-night, you must carry the fiery torch north, south, east, and west—till you’ve secured Westminster Abbey for both of us, or at least a tablet in St. Paul’s. Then look what a subject for your eloquence you have—the guarding of England from any possible combination of her foes—the island-citadel made impregnable—‘compass’d by the inviolate sea’—defence not defiance—you understand the kind of thing. But really, Vin, you know, there is going to be an awful stramash, as my old nurse used to say, in Europe before the century is out; and

England's safety will lie in her being strong enough to remain aloof. And how? Why, by trebling her present navy."

"Trebling her present navy!" Vincent repeated, in a vague sort of way.

"Yes," Musselburgh went on coolly. "And it can easily be done, without involving a single farthing of taxation. I want the people of this country to show what they can do voluntarily; I want them to make a tremendous effort to render Great Britain secure from attack for a century at least; and the manner of doing it is to form a National Patriotic Fund, to which everybody, man and woman, merchant and apprentice, millionaire and club-waiter, can subscribe, according to their means and the genuineness of their patriotism. Here is a chance for everybody; here is a test of all those professions of love of country. Why, it would become a point of honour, with the very meanest, if the nation were thoroughly aroused, and if a splendid example were set in high places. The Queen, now—who is more directly interested in the safety of the country than she is?—why should she not head the list with £100,000? I would call the fund the Queen's Fund; and I should not wonder if we were to get two or three maniacs—very useful maniacs—patriots they would have been called in other days—to cut their possessions in half, and hand the one half bodily over to Her Majesty: that would be something like an example!"

"But is it all a wild speculation, Musselburgh?" asked Vincent, who was puzzled. "Or do you mean it seriously?"

"Ha and hum," said the young peer, significantly. "That depends. I should want to sound some of the dukes about it. And first of all I must have some sort of scheme ready, to get rid of obvious objections. They might say 'Oh, you want to treble the Navy? Then in twenty years you'll find yourself with a crowd of obsolete ships, and all your money gone.' That is not what I mean at all. I mean the formation of an immense voluntary national fund, which will keep the Navy at double or treble its present strength, not by a sudden multiplication of ships, but by gradually adding vessels of the newest construction, as improvements are invented. An immense fund doubtless; for of course there would be maintenance; but what couldn't a rich country like England do if she chose? And that's what I'm coming to, with regard to you, my young Demosthenes. It would be infinitely better—it would be safer—it would be building on securer foundations—if the demand for such a

movement came from the country itself. If the Queen, and the dukes, and the millionaires were to subscribe as if in answer to an appeal from the people, the enthusiasm would be tremendous; it would be such a thing as never happened before in the history of England: talk about noble ladies flinging their jewels into the public treasury?—why, every school-girl would bring out her hoarded pocket-money, with her lips white with patriotic fervour. England can subscribe on all possible occasions for the benefit of other countries: for once let her subscribe on her own behalf!" Lord Musselburgh went on, though it might have been hard to say what half-mocking bravado intermingled with his apparent enthusiasm. "And that's where you would come in. You would be the emissary, the apostle, the bearer of the fiery torch. You've done very well with the grocers' assistants of Mendover; but fancy having to wake up England, Canada, Australia, and the Cape to the necessity for making the Mother Country once for all invulnerable, in the interests of peace and universal freedom. Why, I could become eloquent about it myself. They cheered your graduated income-tax; but what would they say to this? Fancy what could be done if every man in this country were to pledge himself to give a year's income! We don't ask him to go out and have his legs or his arms amputated, or his head shot off; we only ask for a year's income—to secure peace and prosperity for himself and his children and his children's children. If there is any patriotism in the country at all, who would say no? And then when there is an iron belt round England, and when there is a floating mass of iron that could be sent at any moment to form a wall round any of her dependencies, then, I suppose, there might be a splendid assemblage in Westminster Hall; and you and I—as the instigators of this great national movement—but my imagination stops short: I don't know what they will make of us."

He himself had to stop short, for he was passing through a wide gateway into the grounds surrounding the Bungalow, and the carriage-drive was almost invisible under the overshadowing trees. Presently they had drawn up in front of the long, low, rambling house; and here were lit windows, and an open door, and servants. The two young men descended, and entered, and went into the billiard-room, where cigars and soda-water and similar things had been set out in readiness for them; and here Lord Musselburgh, lying back in a cane-bottomed chair, proceeded to talk in a less random fashion about this project of his,

until he had almost persuaded his companion that there was something reasonable and practicable in it, if only it could be properly initiated.

"Anyhow," said he to his guest, as they were both retiring for the night, "it is some big movement like that, Vin, my lad, that you want to get identified with, if your aim is to make a position in English public life. You have advantages. You can speak well. You will have plenty of money. You are beginning with the proletariat—that is laying a foundation of popularity. You have youth and heaps of strength on your side. Then — is known to be your friend. What more?"

What more, indeed? The future seemed to smile on this young man; and if his dreams, waking or sleeping, had been of great achievements and public triumphs, who could have wondered? But curiously enough, just at this time, the forecasts that came to him in moments of quiet were apt to be sombre. He dreaded he hardly knew what. And these vague forebodings of the day took a more definite shape in the far-reaching visions of the night; for again and again there recurred to him that phantasmal picture that had suddenly startled him when old George Bethune was talking of the possibilities that might be lying in store for his granddaughter. Vin Harris had never seen Balloray—did not know where it was, in fact; but night after night he beheld with a strange distinctness the big baronial building, and the black firs, and the gate with the otter's head in stone. Had that been all! But as regularly there came forth the tall young girl with the long-flowing hair; and he was a poor wanderer, cowering away from recognition; and again she would ride by, along the white road, until she was lost in the dappled sun and shadow under the beeches. Then there was a song somewhere—perhaps it was the trembling leaves that whispered the refrain—but it was all about separation, and loneliness, and the sadness of remembrance and of loss. *Chante, rossignol, chante, toi qui as le cœur gai*—this was what he heard, or seemed to hear, away in that distant land, where he had been left alone . . . *J'ai perdu ma maîtresse, sans l'avoir mérité* . . . It was strange that no birds sang in these woods, that no lark hung quivering in those skies: all was silence—save for that continuous murmur of farewell. . . . *Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime, jamais je ne t'oublierai*. And sometimes the murmur rose into a larger monotone; the big grey building, and the black firs, and the highway, and the beeches, disappeared; and behold in their stead was a great breadth of

sea, desolate, and rain-swept, and void of all sign of life. And was this the barrier now between him and her? Not merely that she was the heiress of Balloray, under the guardianship of her implacably proud old grandfather, but that she was away in some far land, beyond those never-ending myriad voices of the deep? . . . *Pour un bouquet de roses, que je lui refusai* . . . What wrong had he done her? What had he denied her, in the time when they were as boy and girl together—when there was no thought of her being the heiress of Balloray—when she used to walk down through Hyde Park, in her simple dress, and sit on the bench, while her grandfather read his newspaper? Then the grey dawn would come; and he would awake to the knowledge that he had been tortured by mere phantasies; and yet these left something in his mind, even during the actual and practical daylight hours. He begun to wish that there was some bond—of what nature he had not determined—for it was all a vague longing and wistful desire—a bond that could so bind Maisrie and him together that that great width of sea should not intervene. For it was a sorrowful kind of thing—even when the white hours of the daylight told him he had only seen it in a dream.

But apart from all these dim anxieties and this haunting unrest, came the strictly matter-of-fact consideration that within an appreciable time old George Bethune and his granddaughter would be returning to the United States. That was no spectral ocean that would then lie between Maisrie and him, but three thousand miles of the Atlantic; and who could tell when the two wanderers might ever see England again? Nay, had not he himself been implored to help in bringing about this separation? Maisrie had begged of him to urge upon her grandfather the necessity of getting the American book done first, before setting out on the poetic pilgrimage through Scotland which was to yield fruit of another kind; and, of course, if the old man consented, the first step to be taken was a voyage to New York. Vincent had drawn many a fancy picture of a little group of three, wandering away through the rich-hued autumn days, by "lone St. Mary's silent lake," or by the banks of the silver 'Tweed; but now all that was to be sacrificed; and he himself was to do what he could towards sending the old man back to America, and Maisrie with him. Then there would be no more of the long, quiet days of study, made happy by anticipations of the evening; no more of the pleasant little dinners in this or that restaurant; no more of those wonderful twilights

in the little parlour, with their enchantments of music and happy converse. London, with Maisrie Bethune three thousand miles away; that would be a strange thing—that he could even now hardly imagine to himself.

Nay, it was a thing that he looked forward to with such an unreasoning dread and dismay that he began to construct all sorts of mad schemes for defeating any such possibility; and at last he hit upon one that seemed more or less practicable, while it would in the meantime virtually absolve him from his promise to Maisrie. On the morning after the meeting of the Mendover Liberal Association, the two young men were returning to town by train; and Vincent said to his companion—

“You were telling me the other night of the Scotch newspaper man whom you got to know in New York: what did you say his name was?”

“Oh, you mean Hugh Anstruther? I hope I spoke no ill of him; for an enthusiastic patriotism such as his is really something to admire in these days. A capital fellow, Hugh; until I fell across him in New York I did not know that I had one virtue transcending all the other virtues, and that was simply my being a brother Scot.”

“What did you say was the name of the paper that he edits?”

“The *Western Scotsman*.”

“And it was he who gave Mr. Bethune a letter of introduction to you?”

But here Lord Musselburgh’s manner instantly changed: he had been answering these questions in a careless way, looking out of the carriage window most of the time: now he turned to his companion, and regarded him with some scrutiny.

“Why do you ask, Vin?” he said. “Do you want to find out something further about the old man?”

Vincent’s forehead flushed; and his eyes gloomed dark.

“I do not,” he made answer, in distinct tones. “I thank goodness my nature is not so suspicious. It seems to me extraordinary that two human beings who have done nothing in the world to deserve it should be regarded with a constant mistrust and doubt. Why? Do you suspect everybody else in the same way?”

“Oh, don’t say that I suspect them,” Lord Musselburgh exclaimed at once—for he was an exceedingly good-natured young man and had no wish to offend. “I don’t know them well enough—don’t know anything at all about them, in fact.”

"You told me yourself that my aunt and you had been talking them over; and I gathered enough from what you said," was the younger man's retort.

"Mrs. Ellison is naturally anxious about anything that concerns your future, Vin—or seems likely to concern it," Musselburgh said. "And you should be the last to object."

"But I do object," he said, stiffly. "I object altogether to her canvassing the character of any friends of mine; and to her putting her doubts and suspicions and hints about them into any third person's imaginations. Oh, yes, I could make out quite clearly what she had been saying. That night at Henley she came on a visit of inspection; it was perfectly obvious. And what is more, she came with the hope of having her suspicions confirmed; and I suppose she was horribly disappointed that Maisrie Bethune did not drop her *h's*, and that Mr. Bethune did not beg the loan of a sovereign from her!"

"Why so passionate, Vin—why so indignant?" his companion put in, glancing at him curiously.

"Because I say it is a shame—a monstrous shame," the young man said, with flaming eyes, "that anyone should be insulted so! Is it their fault that they have no friends, that they are unknown, that they are poor? To be wealthy is to be virtuous, of course; if you have a long balance at your bankers', you are above suspicion then; if you have house-boats, and four-in-hands, and gold plate, you're all right. I suppose," said he, altering his tone, "that it was on that very evening—the evening of her inspection—that my aunt was kind enough to talk over those two friends of mine with you, and tell you of all the portentous things she suspected of them. But I presume she did not repeat to you the very last words she used to me as she said good-night?"

"About what?"

"About Miss Bethune," said Vincent—though it cost him an indescribable effort to pronounce her name.

"Well, I believe she did," Lord Musselburgh admitted. "For she had just come away from hearing Miss Bethune sing some Canadian song or another; and she was very much struck; and she said she had confessed as much to you. Oh, more than that—I don't precisely remember the words. But really, Vin, when you come to think of it, you must acknowledge that there is not much guidance as to character, or antecedents, or anything else, in the mere singing of a song. Mrs. Ellison, who is always posing as a callous woman of the world, is really very

sympathetic and generous, and warm-hearted; and she was quite taken captive by the charm and simplicity of this *Claire Fontaine*—is that the name of it?—but at the same time I should not place too great a value—”

“I quite agree with you,” the younger man said, interrupting without apology. “I place no more value on my aunt’s acquittal and commendation than on her previous suspicions. And—and—if you don’t mind, Musselburgh, I would rather not have the question discussed further, nor Miss Bethune’s name mentioned in any way whatsoever.”

“Oh, but remember I said nothing against her,” Lord Musselburgh finally added, in perfect good humour. “How could I?—I hope your new friends are all you think them; and as for the young lady, it is difficult to believe any harm of so refined and sweet a face. But I hope you won’t concern yourself too much with them, Vin; you have other, and perhaps more serious, interests in life; and it seems to me that everything promises well for you. Why, at this moment, man, don’t you know what ought to be occupying all your attention?”

“What?” his companion asked—perhaps glad enough to get away from that delicate topic.

“At least I know what I should be thinking of if I were in your shoes. I should be wondering how much space the editor of the *Mendover Weekly Guardian* was going to give me on Saturday morning next.”

It was another editor whom Vincent had in his mind at that moment. As soon as he got back to London he wrote and despatched the following letter, which was addressed to “Hugh Anstruther, Esq., *Western Scotsman* Office, New York, U.S.A.”

“DEAR SIR,

“I hope you will be so kind as to consider the contents of this note as strictly private and confidential. In a recent conversation with Lord Musselburgh he informed me that it was you who had given a letter of introduction to him to Mr. George Bethune; and from Mr. Bethune himself I learn that he, Mr. Bethune, is about to bring out a volume on the Scottish poets in America, as soon as he can conveniently get the materials together. But to this end it would appear that he must revisit the United States and Canada, to obtain particulars of the lives of the various poets and verse-writers, and perhaps, also, examples of their work. Now I wish to ask you, as a friend of Mr. Bethune’s, whether all this fatigue and travel

might not be spared him, supposing there were some person or persons in this country willing to defray the cost of having those materials collected for him. To speak plainly, do you, sir, know of any writer, connected with the press or otherwise, who would undertake, for a sufficient consideration, to bring together biographical memoranda of the authors in question, along with specimens of their work, which could be sent over here to Mr. Bethune, for him to put into shape and issue in book-form? Mr. Bethune, as you know, is an old man, who must surely have had enough of travelling; moreover he has in mind a leisurely ramble through Scotland which, while also leading to literary results, would involve much less fatigue than a voyage to the United States and Canada. I should be greatly obliged if you would tell me whether you consider it practicable to collect those materials by deputy; also, if you know of anyone capable of undertaking the task; and what remuneration he would probably require. I beg you to forgive me, a stranger, for thus appealing to you; but I know you will not grudge a little trouble for the sake of a friend and a fellow Scotchman.

“Yours faithfully and obediently,
“VINCENT HARRIS.”

After sending off that letter the young man's spirits lightened considerably; he saw there was still a chance that Maisrie Bethune, her grandfather, and himself might together set out on that coveted perambulation of the legend-haunted districts of the North. And now he and they had returned to their ordinary mode of life—which perhaps pleased him better than the ostentatious festivities of Henley. Here was no staring crowd, here were no suspicious friends, to break in upon their close and constant companionship. He rejoiced in this isolation; he wished for no fourth person at the quiet little dinners in the restaurants; he had no desire that anyone should share the privacy of the hushed small parlour where old George Bethune loftily discoursed of poetry and philosophy, of ancient customs and modern manners, and where Maisrie played pathetic Scotch airs on the violin, or sang in her low clear voice of *le pont d'Avignon* or perhaps of *Marianson, dame jolie*. Moreover, he could not fail to perceive, and that with an ever-increasing delight, that her old expression of sad and wistful resignation was gradually being banished from her eyes; and not only that, but a quite fresh colour was come into her cheeks, so that

the pale sun-tinge was less perceptible. Perhaps it was the companionship of one nearer to her own age that had made a difference in her life; at all events much of her former shyness was gone; she met his look frankly, sometimes with a touch of gratitude, sometimes with simple gladness, as if his mere presence was something that pleased her. When she was watering the flowers in the little balcony, and caught sight of him over the way, she nodded and smiled: he wondered whether it was that faint-sun-tinge of the complexion that made her teeth seem so clearly white. He began to forget those dreams of a wide intervening sea: this present existence was so peaceable, and contented, and happy. And in spite of Maisrie's injunction, those dreams of Scotland would recur: he saw three newly-arrived strangers walking along Princes Street, Edinburgh, in the silver glare of the morning; and the middle one of the three—looking away up to the dusky shadows of the Castle rock—was no other than Maisrie Bethune herself, with light and gladness shining in her eyes.

And what had old George Bethune to say to this constant association and this fast friendship between the two young people? Well, old George Bethune had an admirable capacity for enjoying the present moment; and so long as the dinner was fairly cooked and the claret to his taste, so long as he had a small and faithful audience to listen to his rhapsodies about Scottish song and Scottish heroism, and so long as Maisrie's violin was in tune and her hand as sensitive as ever on the trembling strings, he did not seem to pay much heed to the future. Perhaps it was but natural that one who had wandered so far and wide should welcome a little peace at last; and perhaps he intentionally blinded his eyes; at all events the young people were allowed the utmost freedom of companionship—it was as if these three formed but one family.

One night, as Vincent was about to leave, the old gentleman said to him—

"About to-morrow evening: I presume we dine at Mentavisti's?"

"Oh, yes, certainly: we've tried a good many places, and we can't do better than Mentavisti's," the young man answered—as if it mattered one brass farthing to him what sort of dinner there was, or where he got it, so long as Maisrie was at the same table!

"Ah, very well. For this is how I am situated," said Mr. Bethune, gravely and grandly as befitted the seriousness of the

theme. "I have an appointment in Jermyn-street at six o'clock. I may be detained. Now I can undertake to be at Mentavisti's Restaurant at seven—and when the dinner-hour is once fixed, to play shilly-shally with it seems to me abominable—but I am not so sure that I shall have time to return home first. It will be better, therefore, and every way safer, for Maisrie to come down by herself in a cab—"

"But mayn't I call for her?" the young man suggested at once. "You know she would much rather walk down than drive."

"Oh, very well, very well, if you don't mind," said Mr. Bethune, with a lofty condescension—or indifference; while Maisrie, instead of being in the least confused by this proposal, looked up with perfectly frank and pleased eyes, apparently giving him a little message of thanks.

Nor was she in the least embarrassed on the following evening, when he was ushered upstairs by the landlady's daughter. Maisrie was alone in the little parlour, ready-dressed except as regarded her gloves, and she was putting a final touch to the few flowers with which she had adorned the table.

"Good evening," said she quite placidly. "I will be with you in a moment, as soon as I have dried my fingers."

She disappeared for a second, and returned. He hesitated before accompanying her to the door.

"Won't you give me one of those flowers?" said he, rather breathlessly.

She seemed a little surprised.

"Now that I think of it," she said, "I have never seen you wear a flower in your coat, as other gentlemen do. And I'm afraid there isn't one here nearly fine enough——"

"If you were to give me a flower, I should not destroy it by wearing it in my coat!" said he.

"Oh, merely a flower?" she asked. She went to the table. "Will this one do?"

It was a white geranium that she handed him, simply enough: he took out his pocket-book, and carefully placed it between the leaves. For the briefest instant she regarded him as if in wonder that he should seek to preserve so worthless a trifle; but she made no remark; and then unconcernedly and cheerfully she led the way downstairs, and together they passed out into the open street.

It was a marvellous and bewildering thing to think that he should be in sole and complete charge of her, here in the midst

of the great and busy world of London. Did these hurrying people guess at his proud elation, his new-found sense of guardianship and responsibility, his anxiety that all things should be pleasant to her; or had they hardly time even to notice this beautiful young creature, her step light as a fawn, fresh colour in her fair cheeks, happiness radiant in her eyes? Perhaps they heeded her and the tall and handsome youth by her side as little as she heeded them; for indeed she seemed to be entirely engrossed in her companion, talking, smiling, replying to him without a shadow of self-consciousness or restraint. To him this new relationship was an amazing kind of thing: she did not seem even to perceive it. To him it was an epoch in his life, to be for ever remembered: to her—well, nearly every evening she walked out in similar fashion with her grandfather, and she did not appear to notice any difference: at least she showed no sign.

But all at once Maisrie altered her manner; and that was when he in the lightness of his heart informed her that there was still a chance of their setting out on that long contemplated pilgrimage to the various poetic shrines of Scotland.

"Mr. Harris," she said proudly, "you made me a promise——"

"Yes, I know I did," he said; "but things have changed, and I'm going to explain to you; and I think you'll find everything satisfactory. But first of all, before I begin, I wish you wouldn't call me 'Mr. Harris.' It sounds detestable. You who are so natural and straightforward in all your ways—why don't you call me Vincent?"

"Don't you think that Mr. Vincent might be a fair compromise?" she asked gently, and with her eyes lowered.

"I've called you Maisrie once or twice, by accident, and you didn't seem to mind," he pointed out.

"I am sure I did not notice," she made answer at once. "How should I? I am used to nothing else."

"Then I am to be allowed to call you Maisrie?" said he, clutching eagerly at this new-found privilege. "And you will call me Vincent—when you find Mr. Vincent become too formal: is it a compact?"

"Yes, it is—Mr. Vincent—if you like," said she, with a smile. "But why do you make it so very serious?"

"Because," said he, gravely, "when any solemn bargain is completed, people shake hands to make it secure."

"Not in the middle of Oxford-street?" she said.

"We will postpone the ceremony, if you prefer it; and now

I will begin and tell you how it is still possible we may have that long ramble through Scotland together. You were anxious that before anything of the kind were attempted, your grandfather should go back to the United States to get materials for his book on the Scottish poets in America. Well, now, it seems a pity to make such a long voyage if it can be done without; and so I have taken the liberty of sending over to New York to see if there isn't some handy young fellow there—some clerk or reporter—who would undertake to collect all the necessary materials, and send them over here for your grandfather to work up. Then we could go to Scotland all the same—that is, if you will let me accompany you."

"Some one to collect the materials and send them over?" she repeated; and then she said: "But would that be fair, Mr. Harris—Mr. Vincent—would that be honest? Surely not! The book would not be my grandfather's book at all; properly, it would belong to the young man in New York."

"I beg your pardon," said he, with decision. "He only supplies the bricks; he does not build the house. When a Chancellor of the Exchequer produces his budget, of course he claims it as his own; but he has got his facts from the heads of departments, and most likely his quotations have been hunted out for him by his private secretary. It would be your grandfather's book, solely and wholly."

"But the cost?" she said, after a second. "Supposing it were practicable, the expense——"

"Oh, never mind about that," said he lightly. "It will be next to nothing—you needn't mind about that. Our deputy in New York will find very little difficulty in getting the memoranda that he wants. There is no sort of unnecessary modesty about minor poets; they will be glad enough to give him specimens of their work, as soon as it is known what he aims at. And in Scotland," he continued (grown suddenly bold) "don't you see how it would work? Your grandfather must have an occasional morning to give to his MSS.; then you and I could leave him in absolute peace and quiet; and we might go away for a stroll up to Arthur's Seat, or round the ramparts of the Castle, and return to him by lunch-time. Wouldn't that be an excellent arrangement?"

"Yes, that would be very nice indeed," said she, with a pleased expression: she seemed to look forward to this close and constant companionship as the most natural thing in the world.

And in fact so sanguine was the young man about the

success of his new scheme that, when the three of them were seated at a small table in Mentavisti's Restaurant, he ventured to hint to old George Bethune his fond hope that he might be allowed to join in the prolonged excursion through Scotland; and the old man at once acquiesced.

"Yes, yes, why not?" he said; and then he went on, absently: "Yet my nerve is not what it was. Sometimes I hesitate. It would grieve me more than I can say if Maisrie here were to be disappointed. It is a long time since I was in the country; perhaps I remember only the beautiful things; and it is only of these she has heard me talk. When Sturrock thinks of the old home, the dappled hills shine for him: you remember, Maisrie?—

'Oh native land! Oh cherished home,
I've sailed across the sea,
And, though my wandering footsteps roam,
My heart still turns to thee!
My thoughts and dreams are sweet and bright
With dew which love distils;
While every gleam of golden light
Falls on the Scottish hills.'

He forgets the mists and the rain and the darkened days. And you, Maisrie, you have been brought up under fair blue skies; you have never learnt how sombre days and wild and driving clouds stir the imagination; perhaps, if you stood in the very street where the 'bonnie Earl o' Moray came sounding through the town,' you would see only the wet pavements and the dull windows; and you might turn to me and say, 'Is this what you have talked about to me, grandfather?'" Then all of a sudden he seemed to throw off this despondent fit as by a violent effort. "No, no!" said he, in quite a different tone. "I will not believe but that there are still yellow cornfields and silver lakes in bonnie Scotland, and the lark singing as high in the heavens as when Tannahill, or Hogg, or Motherwell paused to listen. I will show you the red rowans hanging from the mountain crag, and the golden bracken down by the side of the burn; and if we go still further away—to the lonely islands of the western seas—then you must learn to forget the soft prettiness of the sunnier south, and to let the mysterious charm of isolation hold you, and the majesty of the darkened mountains, and the pathetic beauty of the wandering veils of rain. I would sooner forget the mother that bore me," he said, with a proud ring in his voice, "than believe that bonnie Scotland had lost her glamour

and wonder and fascination. And you would be no holiday-tourist, Maisrie; you belong by blood to the 'land of wild weather'; and imagination is part of the dowry of youth. No, no; I do not fear. I—I made a mistake when I said I was afraid—I am not afraid of you, Maisrie—not afraid of you—you have the fine sympathy, the intelligence, the quick imagination that I can trust—I am not afraid of you, Maisrie——”

“You need not be afraid, grandfather,” the girl said, gently—for she saw that he was somewhat disturbed. “Why should you be afraid, grandfather? I shall be looking with your eyes.”

But the curious thing was that despite all this talking about the projected pilgrimage, it never seemed to come any nearer. No mention of a date, or even of any approximate time, was ever made. In like manner, their return to America, though the old gentleman spoke of it now and again as a fixed and definite and necessary thing, kept receding backwards and backwards into a perfectly nebulous future. The present moment was everything to old George Bethune, whether he was engaged with a roe-deer cutlet at a restaurant in Regent-street, or lighting his pipe and mixing his toddy on his return home, while he was descanting on Barbour, and Drummond, and Sir David Lindesay, or Ramsay, and Ferguson, and Burns. People were beginning to leave town; Vincent had received, and declined, an invitation to join a big house-party in Argyllshire, notwithstanding that it was to the same house that Mrs. Ellison and Lord Musselburgh were going; but old George Bethune and his granddaughter appeared to pay no heed to the changing times and seasons; their placid, uneventful life seemed quite enough for them. And was it not enough for this young man also, who had been admitted to be their constant associate and friend? Why should he vex himself about literary schemes that were none of his devising? Day by day he waved a good morning to Maisrie as she came to water her flowers, and an answer came from her smiling eyes; sometimes he walked out into the parks in the afternoon, with her grandfather and herself, and ever he rejoiced to see that the fine peach-bloom on her cheek was surmounting the sun-tinge that had been left there by travel; then in the evening they had all London to choose from, as to where they should dine, with a quiet stroll homeward thereafter, to music, and dominoes, and careless talk. What more? The great outer world might go on its way, and welcome.

But Master Vin was about to be startled out of this dreamful ease. At last there came an answer to the communication he

had sent to the editor of the *Western Scotsman*, with many apologies for unavoidable delay; Mr. Anstruther, it appeared, had been in Canada, taking his annual holiday among his kinsmen and countrymen there.

"I must say your letter has astonished me beyond measure," the writer went on, "and I would fain believe that there is some great mistake somewhere, which is capable of explanation. It is quite true that when I gave my venerable friend Mr. Bethune a note of introduction to Lord Musselburgh, I was aware that he had in view various literary projects—in fact, his brain teems with them as if he were a young man of five-and-twenty—the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* in his case has taken hold of his imagination; but I cannot understand how he could have included in these the publication of a volume on the Scottish poets in America, for the simple reason that he must have known that such a work was not only in progress here, but that it was near completion. Why, I myself showed Mr. Bethune proofs of the early sheets of this volume; for the author is a particular friend of mine; and as it was being set up, he used to send me the sheets as they were printed; and Mr. Bethune being in the habit of calling at my office, I not only showed them to him, but I fancy I let him take some of them away, that he might read them at his leisure. How he should now propose to bring out a similar work—and bespeak Lord Musselburgh's patronage for it, as I presume he did—passes my comprehension, except on the ground that, being an old man, he may have suffered from some temporary attack of mental aberration and forgetfulness. I would rather believe this than that a man whom I had taken for a thorough Scot, loyal and true to the backbone, and proud of his country and of his own name and lineage, should be endeavouring to supplant another worker who is already in possession of the field. However, no actual harm can be done; for the volume I speak of is on the eve of publication, and no doubt it will be issued simultaneously in England. That is all I have to say, on a subject which at present seems to me to have something of a painful aspect—though I hope a satisfactory explanation may be forthcoming. In conclusion may I beg of you to keep this letter private? The facts are as I have stated; but I would rather Mr. Bethune did not know you had them from me,

"Yours faithfully,

"HUGH ANSTRUTHER."

For some time Vincent sat with this letter in his hand, in a sort of stupefaction. Curiously enough his first question to himself was—What if Mrs. Ellison should get to know?—would she not triumphantly declare that her worst suspicions had been confirmed? That was but a first thought. There must be some explanation! He had not associated so continually with George Bethune—he had not heard the old man's voice thrill with proud emotion as he spoke of Scotland's hills and dales—he had not seen his eyes fill with unbidden tears as he talked of his granddaughter and the loneliness that might be in store for her—all for nothing: not at once could he be convinced that this old man was a mere charlatan, a thief, a begging-letter impostor. But he had been startled; and when he reached his lodgings in that small thoroughfare, he hardly dared look across the way: he knew not what to think.

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBTS AND DREAMS.

AND at first Vincent was for rebelliously thrusting aside and ignoring this information that had reached him so unexpectedly. Was he, on the strength of a statement forwarded by an unknown correspondent in New York, to suspect—nay, to condemn unheard—this proud and solitary old man with whom he had all this while been on terms of such close and friendly intimacy? Had he not had ample opportunities of judging whether George Bethune was the sort of person likely to have done this thing that was now charged against him? He went over these past weeks and months. Was it any wonder that the old man's indomitable courage, his passionate love of his native land, and the constant and assiduous care and affection he bestowed on his granddaughter, should have aroused alike the younger man's admiration and his gratitude? What if he talked with too lofty an air of birth and lineage, or allowed his enthusiasm about Scotland and Scottish song to lead him into the realms of rodomontade: may not an old man have his harmless foibles? Any one who had witnessed Maisrie's devotion to her grandfather, her gentle forbearance

and consideration, her skilful humouring of him, and her never-failing faith in him, must have got to know what kind of man was old George Bethune.

And yet, when Vincent turned to the letter, it seemed terribly simple, and straightforward, and sincere. There was no vindictiveness in it at all; rather there was a pained surprise on the part of the writer that a loyal Scot—one, too, who had been admitted into that fraternity of song-writing exiles over the water—should have been guilty of such a flagrant breach of trust. Then Lord Musselburgh's patronage, as the young man knew very well, had taken the form of a cheque; so that the charge brought by the writer of this letter practically was that George Bethune had obtained, and might even now be obtaining, money by fraud and false pretences. It was a bewildering thing—an impossible thing—to think of. And now, as he strove to construct all sorts of explanatory hypotheses, there seemed to stand in the background the visionary form of Mrs. Ellison; and her eyes were cold and inquiring. How had she come to suspect? It was not likely that she could be familiar with the Scotch-American newspaper offices of the United States.

No, he could make nothing of it; his perplexity only increased. All kinds of doubts, surmises, possible excuses went chasing each other through his brain. Perhaps it was only literary vanity that had prompted the old man to steal this project when it was placed before him? Or perhaps he thought he had a better right to it, from his wide knowledge of the subject? Vincent knew little of the laws and bye-laws of the literary world; perhaps this was but a bit of rivalry carried too far; and in any case, supposing the old man had erred in his eagerness to claim this topic as his own, surely that did not prove him to be a charlatan all the way through, still less a professional impostor? But then his making use of this scheme to obtain money—and that not only from Lord Musselburgh? Oh, well (the young man tried to convince himself) there might not be so much harm in that. No doubt he looked forward to issuing the volume, and giving his patrons value in return. Old George Bethune, as he knew, was quite careless about pecuniary matters: for example, if the bill for those little dinners at the various restaurants was paid by some one, that was enough; the old gentleman made no further inquiries. He was content to let his young friend settle these trivial details; and Master Vin was willing enough. In fact, the

latter had devised a system by which the awkwardness of calling for the bill in Maisrie's presence was avoided; this system worked admirably; and Mr. Bethune asked no questions. Doubtless, if he had remembered, or taken the trouble, he would have paid his shot like any one else.

But amid all these conflicting speculations, there was one point on which the mind of this young man remained clear and unswerving; and that was that whatever might be the character or career of old George Bethune, his principles or his practice, Maisrie was as far apart and dissociated from them as if worlds intervened. If there had been any malfeasance in this matter, she, at least, was no sharer in it. And the more he pondered, the more anxious he became to know whether Maisrie had any idea of the position in which her grandfather was placed. How much would he be entitled to tell her, supposing she was in ignorance? And when could he hope for an opportunity? And then again, failing an opportunity, how was he to go and spend the evening with those two friends of his, pretending to be entirely engrossed by their little amusements and occupations outdoors and in, while all the time there was lying in his pocket this letter, unanswered and perhaps unanswerable?

Fortune favoured him. Towards evening, a little before six o'clock, he heard a door shut on the other side of the street; and, lifting his head, he perceived that it was Mr. Bethune who had just come out of the house, alone. Here was a chance not to be missed. Waiting for a couple of minutes, to make sure that the coast was clear, he passed downstairs, crossed the little thoroughfare, and knocked. The landlady told him that Miss Bethune was upstairs, and upstairs he went. The next moment a voice that he knew well invited him to enter, and therewithal the two young people found themselves face to face.

"You are early," she said, with a little smile of welcome, as she stopped in her sewing.

"Yes," said he, and he added quite frankly, "I saw your grandfather go out, and I wished to speak with you alone. The fact is, Maisrie," he continued, taking a chair opposite her, "I have heard from America to-day about that proposal I made—to get some one to collect materials for your grandfather's book; and the answer is rather a strange one—I don't quite understand—perhaps you can tell me something about it." He hesitated, and then went on: "Maisrie, I suppose it never occurred to

you that—that some one else in America might be proposing to bring out a similar book?”

She looked up quickly, and with a certain apprehension in her eyes.

“Oh, yes, I knew. My grandfather told me there had been talk of such a thing. What have you heard?”

He stared at her.

“You knew?” said he. “Then surely you might have told me!”

There was something in his tone—some touch of reproach—that brought the blood to her face; and yet she answered calmly and without resentment——

“Did I not tell you?—nor my grandfather? But perhaps neither of us thought it of much importance. It was only some vague talk, as I understood; for every one must have known that no one was so familiar with the subject as my grandfather, and that it would be foolish to try to interfere with him. At the same time I have always been anxious that he should get on with the book, for various reasons; and if you have heard anything that will induce him to begin at once, so much the better.”

It was clear that she was wholly in ignorance of the true state of the case.

“No,” said he, watching her the while. “What I have heard will not have that effect, but rather the reverse. To tell you the plain truth, the American or Scotch-American writer has finished his book, and it will be out almost directly.”

She sprang to her feet with an involuntary gesture, and stood still for a moment, her lips grown suddenly pale, and her eyes bewildered; and then she turned away from him to hide her emotion, and walked to the window. Instantly he followed her.

“Maisrie, what is the matter!” he exclaimed in astonishment, for he found that tears had sprung to her eyes.

“Oh, it is a shame—it is a shame,” she said, in broken accents, and her hands were clenched, “to steal an old man’s good name from him, and that for so small a thing! What harm had he ever done them? The book was such a small thing—they might have left it to him—what can they gain from it——”

“But Maisrie——?”

“Oh, you don’t understand, Vincent, you don’t understand at all,” she said, in a despairing sort of way, “how my grand-

father will be compromised! He undertook to bring out the book; he got friends to help him with money; and now—now—what will they think?—what can I say to them?—what can I do? I—I must go to them—but—but what can I say?”

Her tears were running afresh now; and at sight of them the young man threw to the winds all his doubts and conjectures concerning George Bethune's honesty. That was not the question now.

“No, you shall not go to them!” said he, with indignant eyes. “You?—you go to any one—in that way? No, you shall not. I will go. It is a question of money: I will pay them their money back. Tell me who they are, and the amounts; and they shall have every farthing of their money back, and at once: what can they ask for more?”

For a second she regarded him with a swift glance of more than gratitude; but it was only to shake her head.

“No, how could I allow you to do that? What explanation could you make? There must be some other way—often I have wished that my grandfather would let me try to earn something—I am willing enough—and I am never sure of my grandfather, because he can believe things so easily.” She had grown calmer now; and over her face there had come the curious look of resignation that he had noticed when first he saw her, and that seemed so strange in a young girl. “I might have expected this,” she went on, absently and sadly. “My grandfather can persuade himself of anything: if he thinks a thing is done, that is enough. I am sure I have urged him to get on with this book—not that I thought anybody could be so mean and cruel as to step in and forestall him—but that he might get free from those obligations; but I suppose when he had once arranged all the materials in his own mind he felt that the rest was easy enough, and that there was no hurry. He takes things so lightly—and now—the humiliation—well, I shall have to bear that——”

“I say you shall not,” he said, hotly. “I claim the privilege of a friend, and you cannot refuse. Who are the people to whom your grandfather is indebted over this volume?” he demanded.

“For one, there is Lord Musselburgh,” she said, but indifferently, as if no hope lay that way. “And there is Mr. Carmichael, who owns an Edinburgh paper—the *Chronicle*.”

“Very well,” said he promptly. “What is to hinder my explaining to them that circumstances have occurred to prevent

Mr. Bethune bringing out the volume he had projected; and that he begs to return them the money they had been good enough to advance?"

She shook her head again and sighed.

"No. It is very kind of you: you are always kind. But I could not accept it. I must try some way myself—though I am rather helpless: it is so difficult to get my grandfather to see things. I told you before: he lives in a world of imagination, and he can persuade himself that everything is well, no matter how we are situated. But it was shameful of them," she said, with her indignation returning, and her lips becoming at once proud and tremulous, "to cheat an old man out of so poor and small a thing! Why, they all knew he was going to write this book—all the writers themselves—they were known to himself personally—and glad enough they were to send him their verses. Well, perhaps they are not to blame. Perhaps they may have been told that he had given up the idea—that is quite likely. At all events, I don't envy the miserable creature who has gone and taken advantage of my grandfather's absence——"

She could say no more just then, for there was a sound below of the door being opened and shut; and the next minute they could hear old George Bethune coming with his active step up the flight of stairs, while he sang aloud, in fine bravura fashion, "'Tis the march—'tis the march—'tis the march of the Cameron men!"

The little dinner in the restaurant that evening was altogether unlike those that had preceded it. The simple and innocent gaiety—the sense of snugness and good-comradeship—appeared to have fled, leaving behind it a certain awkwardness and restraint. Vincent was entirely perplexed. The story he had heard from America was in no way to be reconciled with Maisrie's interpretation of her grandfather's position; but it was possible that the old man had concealed from her certain material facts; or perhaps had been able to blind himself to them. But what troubled the young man most of all was to notice that the old look of pensive resignation had returned to Maisrie's face. For a time a brighter life had shone there; the natural animation and colour of youth had appeared in her cheeks; and her eyes had laughter in them, and smiles, and kindness and gratitude; but all that had gone now—quite suddenly, as it seemed—and there had come back that strange sadness, that look of unresisting and hopeless acquiescence. Alone of the little party of three George Bethune retained his

usual equanimity; nay, on this particular evening he appeared to be in especial high spirits; and in his careless and garrulous good-humour he took little heed of the silence and constraint of the two younger folk. They made all the better audience; and he could enforce and adorn his main argument with all the illustrations he could muster; he was allowed to have everything his own way.

And perhaps Vincent, thinking of Maisrie, and her tears, and the hopelessness and solitariness of her position, may have been inclined to resent what he could not but regard as a callous and culpable indifference. At all events, he took the first opportunity that presented itself of saying—

“I hope I am not the bearer of ill-news, Mr. Bethune; but I have just heard from New York that some one over there has taken up your subject, and that a volume on the Scotch poets in America is just about ready, and will be published immediately.”

Maisrie glanced timidly at her grandfather; but there was nothing to fear on his account; he was not one to quail.

“Oh, indeed, indeed,” said he, with a lofty magnanimity. “Well, I hope it will be properly and satisfactorily done; I hope it will be done in a way worthy of the subject. Maisrie, pass the French mustard, if you please. A grand subject: for surely these natural and simple expressions of the human heart are as deeply interesting as the more finished, the more literary, productions of the professional poet. A single verse, rough and rugged as you like—and the living man stands revealed. Ay, ay, so the book is coming out. Well, I hope the public will be lenient; I hope the public will understand that these men are not professional poets, who have studied and written in leisure all their lives; it is but a homely lilt they offer; but it is genuine; it is from the heart—and it speaks to the heart——”

“But, grandfather,” said Maisrie, “you were to have written the book!”

“What matters it who compiles the pages?—that is nothing at all; that is in a measure mechanical. I am only anxious that it should be well done, with tact, and discretion, and modesty,” he continued—and with such obvious sincerity that Vincent was more than ever perplexed. “For the sake of old Scotland I would willingly give my help for nothing—a little guidance here and there—a few biographical facts—even an amended line. But, after all, the men must speak for them

selves; and well they will speak, if the public will but remember that these verses have for the most part been thought of during the busy rush of a commercial life, and written down in a chance evening hour. It will be a message across the sea, to show that Scotland's sons have not forgotten her. MacGregor Crerar—Donald Ramsay—Hugh Ainslie—Evan MacColl—Andrew Wanless—I wonder if they have got Wanless's address to the robin that was sent to him from Scotland—you remember, Maisrie?

'There's mair than you, my bonnie bird,
Hae crossed the raging main,
Wha mourn the blythe, the happy days,
They'll never see again.
Sweet bird, come sing a sang to me,
Unmindfu' o' our ills;
And let us think we're ance again
'Mang our ain heather hills!'

The book will be welcomed by many a proud heart, and with moist eyes, when it gets away up among the glens, to be read by the fireside and repeated at the plough; and I think, Maisrie, when you and I take a walk along Princes Street in Edinburgh we may see more than one or two copies in the booksellers' windows. Then I hope *Blackwood* will have a friendly word for it; and I am sure Mr. Carmichael will allow me to give it a hearty greeting in the *Weekly Chronicle*."

"But, grandfather," said Maisrie, almost piteously, "surely you forget that you undertook to bring out this book yourself!"

"Yes, yes," said he, with perfect good humour. "But 'the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley.' And I do not grudge to some other what might have been mine—I mean the association of one's name with such a band of true and loyal Scotchmen. No; I do not grudge it; on the contrary, I am prepared to give the volume the most generous welcome in my power; it is not for a brother Scot to find fault in such a case, or to be niggard of his praise. I hope we are capable of showing to the world that 'we're a' John Thampson's bairns.'"

Maisrie was growing desperate. Her grandfather would not understand; and how was she to speak plain—with Vincent listening to every word? And yet she knew that now he was aware of all the circumstances; concealment was impossible; and so she forced herself to utterance.

"Grandfather," said she—and her face was flushed a rose-red, though she seemed to take no heed of her embarrassment, so earnest and imploring was her speech, "You cannot forget the obligations you put yourself under—to Lord Musselburgh and Mr. Carmichael, and perhaps others. You undertook to write the book. If that is impossible now, it is a great misfortune; but at least there is one thing you must do; you must explain to them what has happened, and give them back the money."

The old man could no longer shelter himself behind his gay and discursive optimism; he frowned impatiently.

"I have already told you, Maisrie," said he, in severely measured accents, "—and you are grown up now, you might understand for yourself—that there are times and seasons when the introduction of business matters is uncalled for, and, in fact, unbecoming; and one of these is, surely, when we come out to spend a pleasant evening with our young friend here. I do not think it necessary that we should discuss our business affairs before him—I presume he would consider such a thing somewhat inappropriate at a dinner-table."

Maisrie's lips quivered; and her grandfather saw it. Instantly he changed his tone.

"Come, come," said he, with a cheerful good nature. "Enough, enough. I can quite comprehend how the *res angusta domi* may tend to give money, and questions of money, an over-prominence in the minds of women. But money, and the obligations that money may place us under, are surely a very secondary affair, to one who looks at human nature with a larger view. I thank God," he went on, with much complacency, "that I have never been the slave of avarice, that even in times of great necessity I have kept subsidiary things in their proper sphere. I do not boast; our disposition is as much a matter of inheritance as the shape of our fingers or feet; and that disposition may be handed down without the accompanying circumstances that developed it. You follow me, Mr. Harris?"

"Oh, yes," said the younger man, gloomily; that quiver of Maisrie's lips was still in his mind.

For the first time since he had known them Vincent was glad to get away from his companions that night; the situation in which he found them and himself alike involved was altogether so strange that he wanted time to think over it. And first of all he put aside that matter of the Scotch-American book as of minor importance: no doubt some kind of explanation was possible, if all the facts were revealed. It was when

he came to consider the position and surroundings of Maisrie Bethune that the young man grew far more seriously concerned; indeed, his heart became surcharged with an immeasurable pity and longing to help. He began to understand how it was that a premature sadness and resignation was written on that beautiful face, and why her eyes so rarely smiled; and he could guess at the origin of that look of hopelessness, as though she despaired of getting her grandfather to acknowledge the realities and the responsibilities of the actual life around him. To Vincent the circumstances in which this young girl was placed seemed altogether tragic; and when he regarded the future that might lie before her, it was with a blank dismay.

Moreover, he now no longer sought to conceal from himself the nature of this engrossing interest in all that concerned her, this fascination and glamour that drew him towards her, this constant solicitude about her that haunted him day and night. Love had originally sprung from pity, perhaps; her loneliness had appealed to him, and her youth, and the wistful beauty of her eyes. But even now that he knew what caused his heart to leap when he heard her footfall on the stairs, or when he happened to look up at the table to find her regard fixed on him, there was no wild desire for a declaration of his fond hopes and dreams. Rather he hung back—as if something mysteriously sacred surrounded her. He had asked her for a flower: that was all. Probably she had forgotten. There seemed no place for the pretty toyings of love-making in the life of this girl, who appeared to have missed the gaiety of childhood, and perhaps might slip on into middle-age hardly knowing what youth had been. 'And yet what a rose was ready to blow there—he said to himself—if only sunshine, and sweet rains, and soft airs were propitious! It was the wide, white days of June that were wanted for her, before the weeks and the months went by, and the darkness and the winter came.

No, he did not speak; perhaps he was vaguely aware that any abrupt disclosure on his part might startle her into maiden reserve; whereas in their present relations there existed the frankest confidence. She made no secret of the subdued and happy content she experienced in this constant companionship; her eyes lit up when he approached; oftentimes she called him 'Vincent' without seeming to notice it. She had given him a flower?—yes, as she would have given him a handful at any or every hour of the day, if she fancied it would please him, and without ulterior thought. They were almost as boy and girl

together in this daily intercourse, this open and avowed comradeship, this easy and unrestricted familiarity. But sometimes Vincent looked ahead—with dim forebodings. He had not forgotten the murmur of that wide sea of separation that he had beheld as it were in a vision; the sound of it, faint, and sad, and ominous, still lingered in his ears.

It was in one of these darker moments that he resolved, at whatever risk, to acquaint old George Bethune with something of his irresolute hopes and fears. The opportunity arrived quite unexpectedly. One morning he was as usual on his way to his lodgings when, at the corner of Upper Grosvenor Street, he met Mr. Bethune coming into Park Lane alone.

"Maisrie is well?" Vincent asked, in sudden alarm, for it was the rarest thing in the world to find grandfather and granddaughter separated.

"Oh, yes, yes," the old man said. "She has some household matters to attend to—dressmaking, I think. Poor lass, she has to be economical; indeed, I think she carries it to an extreme; but it's no use arguing with Maisrie; I let her have her own way."

"I wanted to speak to you—about her," Vincent said, and he turned and walked with the old man, across the street into Hyde Park. "I have often wished to speak to you—and—and of course there was no chance when she herself was present——"

He hesitated, casting about for a beginning; then he pulled himself together, and boldly flung himself into it.

"I hope you won't take it for impertinence," said he. "I don't mean it that way—very different from that. But you yourself, sir, you may remember, you spoke to me about Maisrie when we were down at Henley together—about what her future might be, if anything happened to you—and you seemed concerned. Well, it is easy to understand how you should be troubled—it is terrible to think of a young girl like that—so sensitive, too—being alone in the world, and not over well-provided for, as you have hinted to me. It would be so strange and unusual a position for a young girl to be in—without relations—without friends—and having no one to advise her or protect her in any way. Of course you will say it is none of my business——"

"But you would like to have it made your business," said old George Bethune, with a bland and good-natured frankness that considerably astounded his stammering companion. "My dear young friend, I know perfectly what you would say. Do

you think I have been blind to the friendly and even affectionate regard you have shown towards my granddaughter all this while, or to the pleasure she has enjoyed in having you to take part in our small amusements? No, I have not been blind. I have looked on and approved. It has been an added interest to our lives; between you and her I have observed the natural sympathy of similar age; and I have been glad to see her enjoying the society of one nearer her own years. But now—now, if I guess aright, you wish for some more definite tie.”

“Would it not be better?” the young man said, breathlessly. “If there were some clear understanding, would not a great deal of the uncertainty with regard to the future be removed? You see, Mr. Bethune, I haven’t spoken a word to Maisrie—not a word. I have been afraid. Perhaps I have been mistaken in imagining that she might in time—be inclined to listen to me——”

He stopped: then he proceeded more slowly—and it might have been noticed that his cheek was a little paler than usual. “Yes, it may be as you say. Perhaps it is only that she likes the companionship of one of her own age. That is natural. And then she is very kind and generous: I may have been mistaken in thinking there was a possibility of something more.”

He was silent now and abstracted: as he walked on he saw nothing of what was around him.

“Come, come, my friend!” George Bethune exclaimed, with much benignity. “Do not vex yourself with useless speculations; you are looking too far ahead; you and she are both too young to burden yourselves with grave responsibilities. A boyish and girlish attachment is a very pretty and engaging thing; but it must not be taken too seriously——”

And here for a second a flash of resentment fired through Vincent’s heart: was it well of this old man to speak so patronisingly of Maisrie as but a child when it was he himself who had thrust upon her more than the responsibilities and anxieties of a grown woman?

“Take things as they are! Do you consider that you have much cause to complain, either the one or the other of you?” old George Bethune resumed, in a still lighter strain. “You have youth and strength, good health, and a constant interest in the life going on around you: is not that sufficient? Why, here am I, nearing my three score years and ten; and every

morning that I awake I know that there lies before me another beautiful, interesting, satisfactory day, that I am determined to enjoy to the very utmost of my power. To-morrow?—to-morrow never yet belonged to anybody—never was of any use to anybody: give me to-day, and I am content to let to-morrow shift for itself! Yes,” he continued, in firm and proud and almost joyous accents, and he held his head erect, “you may have caught me in some unguarded moment—some moment of nervous weakness or depression—beginning to inquire too curiously into the future; but that was a transient folly; I thank God that it is not my habitual mood! Repining, complaining, anticipating: what good do you get from that? Surely I have had as much reason to repine and complain as most; but I do not waste my breath in remonstrating with ‘fickle Fortune.’ ‘Fickle Fortune!’” he exclaimed, in his scorn—“if the ill-favoured jade were to come near me I would give her a wallop across the buttocks with my staff, and bid her get out of my road! ‘Fickle Fortune!’ She may ‘perplex the poor sons of a day;’ but she shall never perplex me—by God and Saint Ringan!”

He laughed aloud in his pride.

“Why,” said he, suddenly changing into quite another vein, “have you not yet come to know that the one priceless thing to think of in the world—the one extraordinary thing—is that at this precise moment you can *see*? For millions and millions of years these skies have been shining, and the clouds moving, and the seas running blue all round the shores; and you were dead and blind to them; unknowing and unknown. Generation after generation of men—thousands and thousands of them—were looking at these things; they knew the hills and the clouds and the fields; the world existed for them; but you could see nothing, you were as if lying dead. Then comes your brief instant; it is your turn; your eyes are opened; and for a little while—a passing second—the universe is revealed to you. Don’t you perceive that the marvellous thing is that out of the vast millions of ages it should be this one particular moment, this present moment, that happens to be given to you? And instead of receiving it with amazement and wonder and joy, why, you must begin to fret and worry and lay schemes, as if you were unaware that the gates of the empty halls of Pluto were waiting to engulf you and shut you up once more in darkness and blindness. Look at those elm-trees—at the water down there—at the moving clouds: isn’t it wonderful to think

that in the immeasurable life of the world this should happen to be the one moment when these things are made visible to you?"

Vincent perceived in a kind of way what the old man meant; but he did not understand why this should make him less concerned about Maisrie's position, or less eagerly covetous of winning her tender regard.

"Well, well," said old George Bethune, "perhaps it is but natural that youth should be impatient; while old age may well be content with such small and placid comforts as may be met with. I should have thought there was not much to complain of in our present manner of life—if you will allow me to include you in our tiny microcosm. It is not exciting; it is simple, and wholesome; and I hope not altogether base and gross. And as regards Maisrie, surely you and she have enough of each other's society even as matters stand. Let well alone, my young friend; let well alone; that is my advice to you. And I may say there are especial and important reasons why I should not wish her to be bound by any pledge. You know that I do not care to waste much thought on what may lie ahead of us; but still, at the same time, there might at any moment happen certain things which would make a great difference in Maisrie's circumstances——"

Vincent had been listening in a kind of absent and hopeless way; but these few words instantly aroused his attention: perhaps this was the real reason why the old man wished Maisrie to remain free?

"A great and marvellous change indeed," he continued, with some increase of dignity in his manner and in his mode of speech. "A change which would affect me also, though that would be of little avail now. But as regards my granddaughter, she might be called upon to fill a position very different from that she occupies at present; and I should not wish her to be hampered by anything pertaining to her former manner of life. Not that she would ever prove forgetful of past kindness; that is not in her nature; but in these new circumstances she might find herself confronted by other duties. Enough said, I hope, on that point. And well I know," he added, with something of a grand air, "that in whatever sphere Maisrie Bethune may be placed, she will act worthily of her name and of the obligations it entails."

He suddenly paused. There was a poorly-clad woman going by, carrying in one arm a baby, while with the other

hand she half dragged along a small boy of five or six. She did not look like a professional London beggar, nor yet like a country tramp; but of her extreme wretchedness there could be no doubt; while there was a pinched look as of hunger in her cheeks.

"Wait a bit!—where are you going?" old George Bethune said to her, in blunt and ready fashion.

The woman turned round startled and afraid.

"I am making for home, sir," she said, timidly.

"Where's that?" he demanded.

"Out Watford way, sir—Abbot's Langley it is."

"Where have you come from?"

"From Leatherhead, sir."

"On foot all the way?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," she said, with a bit of a sigh.

"And with very little food, I warrant?" said he.

"Little indeed, sir."

"Have you any money?"

"Yes, sir—a matter of a few coppers left. I gave what I had to my old mother—she thought she was dying, and sent for me to bring the two little boys to see her—but she's better, sir, and now I'm making for home again."

"Oh, you gave what you had to your mother? Well," said he, deliberately, "I don't know whether what I have will amount to as much, but whatever it is you are welcome to it."

He dived into his trousers pockets and eventually produced about half a handful of shillings and pence; then he searched a small waistcoat-pocket and brought forth two sovereigns. It was all his wealth.

"Here, take that, and in God's name get yourself some food, woman!" said he, unconsciously lapsing into a pronounced Scotch accent. "You look starved. And this bit of a laddie, here—buy him some sweet things as well as bread and butter when you get up to the shops. And then when you're outside the town, you'll just give some honest fellow a shilling, and you'll get a cast of an empty cart to help you on your road. Well, good-day to ye—no, no, take what there is, I tell ye, woman!—bless me, you'll need most of it before you get to your own fireside. On your ways, now!—and when you reach the shops, don't forget the barley-sugar for this young shaver."

So he turned away, leaving the poor woman so overwhelmed that she had hardly a word of thanks; and when he had gone

for some little distance all he said was—with something of a rueful laugh—

“There went my luncheon; for I promised Maisrie I should not return home till near dinner-time.”

“And you have left yourself without a farthing?” the young man exclaimed. “Well, that’s all right—I can lend you a few sovereigns.”

“No, no,” said old George Bethune, with a smile, and he held up his hand in deprecation. “I am well pleased now; and if I should suffer any pangs of starvation during the day, I shall be glad to think that I can endure them better than that poor creature with the long tramp before her. To-night,” said he, rubbing his palms together with much satisfaction, “to-night, when we meet at Mentavisti’s, I shall be all the hungrier and all the happier. Ah, must you go now?—good-bye, then! We shall see you at half-past six, I suppose; and meantime, my friend, dismiss from your mind those cares and anxious thoughts about the future. ‘To the gods belongs to-morrow!’”

Now this little incident that had just happened in Hyde Park comforted Vincent exceedingly. Here was something definite that he could proudly set against the vague and unworthy suspicions of Mrs. Ellison. Surely the man was no plausible impostor, no charlatan, no crafty schemer, who could so readily empty his pockets, and look forward to a day’s starvation, in order to help a poor and unknown vagrant-woman? No doubt it was but part and parcel of his habitual and courageous disregard of consequences, his yielding to the generous impulse of the moment; but, if the truth must be told, Master Vin was at times almost inclined to envy old George Bethune his splendid audacity and self-confidence. Why should the younger man be the one to take forethought for the morrow; while the venerable graybeard was gay as a lark, delighted with the present hour, and defiant of anything that might happen? And what if the younger man were to follow the precepts of the elder, and lapse into a careless content? Their way of living, as George Bethune had pointed out, was simple, happy, and surely harmless. There were those three forming a little coterie all by themselves; enjoying each other’s society; interested in each other’s pursuits. The hours of the daytime were devoted to individual work; then came the glad reunion of the evening and the sallying forth to this or the other restaurant; thereafter the little dinner in the corner, with its glimpses of foreign folk, and its gay talk filled with

patriotism and poetry and reminiscences of other lands; finally the hushed enchantment of that little parlour, with Maisrie and her violin, with dominoes, and discussions literary and political, while always and ever there reigned a perfect frankness and good fellowship. Yes, it seemed a happy kind of existence, for these three. And was not old George Bethune in the right in thinking that the young people should not hamper themselves by any too grave responsibilities? A boyish and girlish attachment (as he deemed it to be) was a pretty and amusing and engaging thing; quite a little idyll, in fact—but not to be taken too seriously. And where the future was all so uncertain, was it not better to leave it alone?

Specious representations, indeed! But this young man, who had his own views and ways of thinking, remained stubbornly unconvinced. It was because the future was so vague that he wanted it made more definite; and as he thought of Maisrie, and of what might befall her when she was alone in the world, and as he thought of his own far-reaching resolves and purposes, he did not in the least consider the relationship now existing between him and her as being merely a pretty little pastoral episode, that would lead to nothing. No doubt their present way of living had many charms and fascinations, if only it would last. But it would not last; it was impossible it should last. Looking back over these past months, Vincent was surely grateful enough for all the pleasant and intimate companionship he had enjoyed; but his temperament was not like that of George Bethune; the passing moment was not everything to him. He had an old head on young shoulders; and it needed no profound reflection to tell him that life could not always consist of the Restaurant Mentavisti and *La Claire Fontaine*.

CHAPTER X.

BY NORTHERN SEAS.

HERE, in front of the great, square, old-fashioned Scotch mansion, which was pleasantly lit up by the morning sun, stood the family waggonette which had just been filled by those of the house-party who were bound for church; and here, too, in

the spacious porch, was Mrs. Ellison, smiling her adieux with rather a sad air.

"Good-bye, dear," said her kindly hostess. "I hope you will have got rid of your headache by the time we get back." And therewith the carriage was driven away along the pebbled pathway, through an avenue of magnificent wide-spreading elms.

Then the tall and graceful young widow, who carried a book in her hand, glanced around her. There was no living thing near except a white peacock that was solemnly stalking across the lawn. Mrs. Ellison strolled towards a hammock slung between two maples, and stood there for a moment, and considered. Should she attempt it? There was no onlooker, supposing some slight accident befell. Finally, however, her courage gave way; she returned to the front of the house; and took possession of a long, low lounging-chair, where she could sit in the sun, and yet have the pages of her book in shadow.

There was a footfall behind her: Lord Musselburgh made his appearance, smoking a cigarette.

"Why," said she, with a prettily affected surprise, "haven't you gone to church? I made sure you had walked on."

"How could I leave you all by yourself," said the young man, with tender sympathy, "and you suffering from a headache?"

Then she professed to be vexed and impatient.

"Oh, do go away to church!" she said. "You can be in plenty of time, if you walk fast enough. If you stop here you know what will go on at lunch. These Drexel girls can look more mischief than any other twenty girls could say or do."

"Oh, no," said he, plaintively, "don't send me away! Let us go for a walk rather. You know, a woman's headache is like her hat—she can put it on or off when she likes. Come!"

"I consider you are very impertinent," said she, with something of offended dignity. "Do you think I shammed a headache in order to stay behind?"

"I don't think anything," said he, discreetly.

"You will be saying next that it was to have this meeting with you?"

"Why, who could dare to imagine such a thing!"

"Oh, very well, very well," said she, with a sudden change to good-nature, as she rose from the chair. "I forgive you. And I will be with you in a second."

She was hardly gone a couple of minutes; but in that brief space of time she had managed to make herself sufficiently picturesque; for to the simple and neat grey costume which clad her tall and slim and elegant figure she had added a bold-sweeping hat of black velvet and black feathers, while round her neck she had wound a black boa, its two long tails depending in front. Thus there was no colour about her, save what shone in her perfect complexion, and in the light and expression of her shrewd, and dangerous, and yet grave and demure blue eyes.

"And really and frankly," said she, as they left the house together, "I am not sorry to have a chance of a quiet talk with you; for I want to tell you about my nephew; I am sure you are almost as much interested in him as I am; and you would be as sorry as I could be if anything were to happen to him. And I am afraid something is going to happen to him. His letters to me have entirely changed of late. You know how proud Vin is by nature—and scornful, too, when you don't act up to his lofty standard; and when I ventured to hint that he might keep his eyes open in dealing with that old mountebank and his pretty granddaughter, oh! the tempestuous indignation of my young gentleman! He seemed to think that a creature such as I—filled with such base suspicions—was not fit to live. Well, I did not quarrel with my handsome boy; in fact, I rather admired his rage and disdain of me; it was part of the singleness of his nature; for he believes everybody to be as straightforward and sincere as himself; and he has a very fine notion of loyalty towards his friends. And vindictive too, the young villain was; I can tell you I was made to feel the enormity of my transgression; I was left to wallow in that quagmire of unworthy doubt in which I had voluntarily plunged myself. So matters went on; and I could only hope for one of two things—either that he might find out something about those people that would sever his connection with them, or that his passing fancy for the girl would gradually fade away. I made sure he would tire of that oracular old humbug; or else he would discover there was nothing at all behind the mysterious eyes and the tragic solemnity of that artful young madam. Oh, mind you," she continued, as they walked along under the over-branching maples, amid a rustle of withered October leaves, "mind you, I don't suspect her quite as much as I suspect the venerable Druid; and I don't recall anything that I said about her. I admit that she beglamoured me with her singing of a French Canadian song; but what is that?—what can you tell

of any one's moral or mental nature from a trick of singing—the thrill of a note—some peculiar quality of voice? Why, the greatest wretch of a man I ever knew had the most beautiful, innocent, honest brown eyes—they could make you believe anything—all the women said he was so good, and so different from other men—well, I will tell you that story some other time—I found out what the honesty of the clear brown eyes was worth.”

Here she was interrupted by his having to open an iron gate for her. When they passed through, they came in sight of a solitary little bay of cream-white sand, touched here and there with russet weed, and ending in a series of projecting rocky knolls covered with golden bracken; while before them lay the wide plain of the sea, ruffled into the intensest blue by a brisk breeze from the north. Still further away rose the great mountains of Mull, and the long stretch of the Morven hills, all of a faint, ethereal crimson-brown in the sunlight, with every glen and water-course traced in lines of purest ultramarine. They had all this shining world to themselves; and there was an absolute silence save for the continuous whisper of the ripples that broke along the rocks; whilst the indescribable murmur—the strange inarticulate voices—of the greater deep beyond seemed to fill all the listening air.

“And I might have known I was mistaken in Vin's case,” she went on, absently. “He was never the one to be caught by a pretty face, and be charmed with it for a time, and pass on and forget. He always kept aloof from that kind of thing—perhaps with a touch of impatient scorn. No; I might have known it was something more serious: so serious, indeed, is it, that he has at last condescended to appeal to me—fancy that!—fancy Vin coming down from his high horse, and appealing to me to be reasonable, to be considerate, and to stand his friend. And the pages he writes to persuade me! Really, if you were to believe him, you would think this old man one of the most striking and interesting figures the world has ever seen—so fearless in his pride, so patient in his poverty, so stout-hearted in his old age. Then his splendid enthusiasm about fine things in literature; his magnanimity over the wrongs he has suffered; his pathetic affection for his granddaughter and his tender care of her—why, you would take him to be one of the grandest human creatures that ever breathed the breath of life! Then about the girl: don't I remember *La Claire Fontaine*? Oh, yes, I remember *La Claire Fontaine*—and little else! You see,

that is just where the trouble comes in as regards my nephew. Hard-headed as he is, and brusque of speech—sometimes, not always—he is just stuffed full of Quixotism; and I dare say it is precisely because this girl is shy and reserved, and has rather appealing eyes, that he imagines all kinds of wonderful things about her, and has made a saint of her, to be worshipped. A merry lass, with a saucy look and a clever tongue, would have no chance with Vin; he would stare at her—perhaps only half-disguising his contempt; and then, if you asked him what he thought of her he would probably say, with a curl of the lip, ‘Impertinent tomboy!’ But when he comes to speak of this one, why, you would think that all womanhood had undergone some process of deification in her solitary self. Come here, and by this divine lamp you shall read and understand whatever has been great and noble and pure and beautiful in all the song and story of the world! And yet perhaps it is not altogether absurd,” the pretty Mrs. Ellison continued, with a bit of a sigh. “It is pathetic, rather. I wish there were a few more such men as that; the world could get on very well with a few more of them. But they don’t seem to exist nowadays.”

“Ah, if you only knew! Perhaps your experience has been unfortunate,” her companion said, wistfully: whereupon the young widow, without turning her head towards him, perceptibly sniggered.

“Oh, *you!*” she exclaimed, in derision. “You! You needn’t pretend to come into that exalted category—no, indeed——”

“I suppose people have been saying things about me to you,” said he, with a certain affectation of being hurt. “But you needn’t have believed them all the same.”

“People!” she said. “People! Why, everybody knows what you are! A professional breaker of poor young innocent girls’ hearts. Haven’t we all heard of you? Haven’t we all heard how you went on in America? No such stories came home about Vin, I can assure you. Oh, we all know what you are!”

“You may have heard one story,” said he, somewhat stiffly; “but if you knew what it really was, you would see that it was nothing to joke about. Some time I will tell you. Some other time when you are in a more friendly, a more believing and sympathetic mood.”

“Oh, yes,” she said, laughing. “A very heartrending story, no doubt! And you were deeply injured, of course,

being so extremely innocent! You forget that I have seen you in a good many houses; you forget that I have been watching your goings-on with Louie Drexel, in this very place. Do you think I can't recognise the old hand—the expert—the artist? Lord Musselburgh, you can't deceive me."

"Probably not," said he, sharply. "If all tales be true you have acquired some experience yourself."

"Oh, who said that about me!" she demanded, with indignation (but her eyes were not indignant, they were rather darkly amused, if only he had made bold to look at them). "Who dared to say such a thing? And of course you listened without a word of protest: probably you assented! What it is to have friends! But perhaps some day I, also, may have a little story to tell you; and then you may understand me a little better."

Here there was another farm-gate for him to open, so that their talk was again interrupted. Then they passed under a series of lofty grey crags hung with birch, and hazel, and rowan, all in their gorgeous autumnal tints; until they came in sight of another secluded little bay, with silver ripples breaking along the sand, and with small outlying islands covered with orange seaweed where they were not white with gulls. And here was a further stretch of that wind-swept, dark blue, striated sea, with the lonely hills of Morven and Kingairloch, sun-dappled and cloud-dappled, rising into the fair turquoise sky. There was a scent of dew-wet grass mingling with the stronger odour of the seaweed; the breeze was blowing freshly in. And always there came to them the long, unceasing, multitudinous murmur of those moving waters, that must have sounded to them so great and vast a thing beside the small trivialities of their human speech.

"Have you read Vin's article in the *Imperial Review*?" said Mrs. Ellison, flicking at a thistle with her sunshade.

"Not yet. But I saw it announced. About American State Legislatures, isn't it, or something of that kind!"

"It seemed to me very ably and clearly written," she said. "But that is not the point. I gather that Vin has been contemplating all kinds of contingencies; and that he is now trying to qualify for the post of leader-writer on one of the daily newspapers. What does that mean?—it means that he is determined to marry this girl, and that he thinks it probable there may be a break between himself and his father in consequence. There may be?—there will be, I give you my word!

My amiable brother-in-law's theories of Socialism and Fraternity and Universal Equality are very pretty toys to play with—and they have even gained him a sort of reputation through his letters to the *Times*; but he doesn't bring them into the sphere of actual life. Of course, Vin has his own little money; and I, for one, why, I shouldn't see him starve in any case; but I take it that he is already making provision for the future and its responsibilities. Now isn't that dreadful? I declare to you, Lord Musselburgh, that when I come down in the morning and find a letter from him lying on the hall table, my heart sinks—just as if I heard the men on the stair bringing down a coffin. Because I know if he is captured by those penniless adventurers, it will be all over with my poor lad; he will be bound to them; he will have to support them; he will have to sacrifice friends and fortune, and a future surely such as never yet lay before any young man. Just think of it! Who ever had such possibilities before him? Who ever had so many friends, all expecting great things of him? Who ever was so petted and caressed and admired by those whose slightest regard is considered by the world at large an honour; and—I will say this for my boy—who ever deserved it more, or remained all through it so unspoiled, and simple, and manly? Oh, you don't know what he has been to me—what I have hoped for him—as if he were my only brother, and one to be proud of! His father is well known, no doubt; he has got a sort of academic reputation; but he is not liked; people don't talk about him as if—as if they cared for him. But Vincent could win hearts as well as fame: ah, do you think I don't know?—trust a woman to know! There is a strange kind of charm and fascination about him: I would put the most accomplished lady-killer in England in a drawing-room, and I know where the girls' eyes would go the moment my Vin made his appearance: perhaps it is because he is so honestly indifferent to them all. And it isn't women only; it isn't merely his good looks; every one, young and old, man and woman, is taken with him; there is about him a sort of magic and glamour of youth—and—and bright promise—and straightforward intention—oh, I can't tell you what!—but—but—it's something that makes me love him!”

“That is clear enough,” said he; and indeed there was a ring of sincerity in her tone, sometimes even a tremor in her voice—perhaps of pride.

“Well,” she resumed, as they strolled along under the beetled crags that were all aflame with golden-yellow birch and

blood-red rowan, "I am not going to stand aside and see all that fair promise lost. I own I am a selfish woman; and hitherto I have kept aloof, as I did not want to get myself into trouble. I am going to hold aloof no longer. The more I hear the more I am convinced that Vin has fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous sharper—perhaps a pair of them; and I mean to have his eyes opened. Here is this new revelation about that American book, which simply means that you were swindled out of £50——"

"One moment," her companion said hastily, and there was a curious look of mortification on his face. "I had no right to tell you that story. I broke confidence: I am ashamed of myself. And I assure you I was not swindled out of any £50. When the old man came to me, with his Scotch accent, and his Scotch patriotism, and his Scotch plaid thrown over his shoulder—well, 'my heart warmed to the tartan'; and I was glad of the excuse for helping him. I did not want any book; and I certainly did not want the money back. But when Vin came to me, and made explanations, and finally handed me a cheque for £50, there was something in his manner that told me I dared not refuse. It was something like 'Refuse this money, and you doubt the honour of the woman I am going to marry.' But seeing that I did take it, I have now nothing to say. My mouth is shut—ought to have been shut, rather, only you and I have had some very confidential chats since we came up here."

"All the same, it was a downright swindle," said she doggedly; "and the fact that Vin paid you back the money makes it none the less a swindle. Now I will tell you what I am about to do. I must be cruel to be kind. I am going to enlist the services of George Morris——"

"Sir George?" he asked.

"No, no; George Morris, the solicitor—his wife and I are very great friends—and I know he would do a great deal for me. Very well; he must get to know simply everything about this old man—his whole history—and if it turns out to be what I imagine, then some of us will have to go to Vin and tell him the truth. It won't be a pleasant duty; but duty never is pleasant. I know I shall be called a traitor for my share in it. Here is Vin appealing to me to be his friend—as if I were not his friend!—begging me to come and take this solitary and friendless girl by the hand, and all the rest of it; and instead of that I go behind his back and try to find out what will destroy his youthful romance for ever. But it's got to be

done," said the young widow with a sigh. "It will be a wrench at first; then six months' despair; and a lifetime of thankfulness thereafter. And of course I must give George Morris all the help I can. He must make inquiries, for one thing, at the office of the *Edinburgh Chronicle*: I remember at Henley the old gentleman spoke of the proprietor as a friend of his. Then the man you know in New York, who gave Mr. Bethune a letter of introduction to you: what is his name and address?"

"Oh, no," said Lord Musselburgh, shrinking back, as it were. "No; I don't want to take part in it. Of course, you may be acting quite rightly; no doubt you are acting entirely in Vin's interests; but—but I would rather have nothing to do with it."

"And yet you call yourself Vin's friend! Come tell me!" she said coaxingly.

Again he refused.

"Mind you, I believe I could find out for myself," she went on. "I know that he is the editor of a newspaper in New York—a Scotch newspaper: come, Lord Musselburgh, give me his name, or the name of the newspaper!"

He shook his head.

"No—not fair," he said.

Then she stopped, and faced him, and regarded him with arch eyes.

"And yet it was on this very pathway, only yesterday morning, that you swore that there was nothing in the world that you wouldn't do for me!"

"That was different," said he, with some hesitation. "I meant as regards myself. This concerns some one else."

"Oh, very well," said she, and she walked on proudly. "I dare say I can find out."

He touched her arm to detain her.

"Have you a note-book?" he asked.

She took from her pocket a combined purse and note-book; and without a word—or a smile—she pulled out the pencil.

"'Hugh Anstruther, *Western Scotsman* Office, New York,'" said he, rather shamefacedly.

"There, that is all right!" she said blithely, and she put the note-book in her pocket again. "That is as far as we can go in that matter at present; and now we can talk of something else. What is the name of this little bay?"

"Little Ganovan, I believe."

"And the other one we passed?"

"Port Bán."

"What is the legend attached to the robber's cave up there in the rocks?"

"The legend? Oh, some one told me the gardener keeps his tools in that cave."

"What kind of a legend is that!" she said, impatiently; and then she went on with her questions. "Why doesn't anybody ever come round this way?"

"I suppose because they know we want the place to ourselves."

"And why should we want the place to ourselves?"

This was unexpected. He paused.

"Ah," said he, "what is the use of my telling you? All your interest is centred on Vin. I suppose a woman can only be interested in one man at any one time."

"Well, I should hope so!" the young widow said, cheerfully. "Shall we go round by the rocks or through the trees?"

For they were now come to a little wood of birch and larch and pine; and without more ado he led the way, pushing through the outlying tall bracken and getting in underneath the branches.

"I suppose," said he, in a rather rueful tone, "that you don't know what is the greatest proof of affection that a man can show to a woman? No, of course you don't!"

"What is it, then?" she demanded, as she followed him, stooping.

"Why, it's going first through a wood, and getting all the spider's-webs on his nose."

But presently they had come to a clearer space, where they could walk together, their footfalls hushed by the carpet of withered fir-needles; while here and there a rabbit would scurry off, and again they would catch a glimpse of a hen-pheasant sedately walking down a glade between the trees. And now their talk had become much more intimate and confidential; it had even assumed a touch of more or less affected sadness.

"It's very hard," he was saying, "that you should understand me so little. You think I am cold, and cynical, and callous. Well, perhaps I have reason to be. I have had my little experience of womankind—of one woman, rather. I sometimes wonder whether the rest are anything like her, or are capable of acting as she did."

"Who was she?" his companion asked, timidly.

And therewith, as they idly and slowly strolled through this little thicket, he told his tragic tale, which needs not to be set down here: it was all about the James river, Virginia, and a pair of southern eyes, and betrayal, and farewell, and black night. His companion listened in the deep silence of sympathy; and when he had finished she said, in a low voice, and with downcast eyes—

“I am sorry—very sorry. But at least there was one thing spared you: you did not marry out of spite.”

He glanced at her quickly.

“Oh, yes,” she said, and she raised her head, and spoke with a proud and bitter air, “I have my story too! I do not tell it to every one. Perhaps I have not told it to any one. But the man I loved was separated from me by lies—by lies; and I was fool and idiot enough to believe them! And the one I told you about—the one with the beautiful, clear, brown eyes—so good and noble he was, as everyone declared!—it was he who came to me with those falsehoods; and I believed them—I believed them—like the fool I was! Oh, yes,” she said, and she held her head high, for her breast was heaving with real emotion this time, “it is easy to say that every mistake meets with its own punishment; but I was punished too much—too much; a life-long punishment for believing what lying friends had said to me!” She furtively put the tips of her fingers to her eyes, to wipe away the tears that lay along the lashes. “And then I was mad; I was out of my senses; I would have married anybody to show that—that I cared nothing for—for the other one; and—and I suppose he was angry too—he would not speak—he stood aside, and knew that I was going to kill my life, and never a single word! That was his revenge—to say nothing—when he saw me about to kill my life! Cruel, do you call it? Oh, no!—what does it matter? A woman’s heart broken—what is that? But now you know why I think so of men—and—and why I laugh at them——”

Well, her laughing was strange: she suddenly burst into a violent fit of crying and sobbing, and turned away from him, and hid her face in her handkerchief. What could he do? This was all unlike the gay young widow who seemed so proud of her solitary estate and so well content. Feeble words of comfort were of small avail. And then, again, it hardly seemed the proper occasion for offering her more substantial sympathy—though that was in his mind all the while, and very nearly on the tip of his tongue. So perforce he had to wait until her

weeping was over; and indeed it was she herself who ended the scene by exclaiming impatiently—

“There—enough of that! I did not intend to bother you with my small troubles when I stayed behind for you this morning. Come, shall we go out on to the rocks, and round by the little bay? What do you call it—Ganovan?”

“Yes; I think they call it Little Ganovan,” he said, absently, as he and she together emerged from the twilight of larch and pine, and proceeded, leisurely and in silence, to cross the semicircular sweep of yellow sand.

When they got to the edge of the rocks, they sat down there: apparently they had nothing to do on this idle morning but to contemplate that vast, far-murmuring, dark blue plain—touched here and there with a sharp glimmer of white—and the range upon range of the Kingairloch hills, deepening in purple gloom, or shining rose-grey and yellow-grey in the sun. In this solitude they were quite alone save for the sea-birds that had wheeled into the air, screaming and calling, at their approach; but the terns and curlews were soon at peace again; a cloud of gulls returned to one of the little islands just in front of them; while a slow-flapping heron winged its heavy flight away to the north. All once more was silence; and the world was to themselves.

And yet what was he to say to this poor suffering soul whose tragic sorrows and experiences had been thus unexpectedly disclosed? He really wished to be sympathetic; and, if he dared, he would have reminded her that

‘Whispering tongues can poison truth,
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.’

only he knew how difficult it is to quote poetry without making one’s self ridiculous; and also he knew that the pretty young widow’s eyes had a dangerous trick of sudden laughter. However, it was she who first spoke.

“I wonder what those who have gone to church will say when they discover that we have spent all the morning here?”

“They may say what they like,” he made answer, promptly. “There are things one cannot speak about in drawing-rooms, among a crowd. And how could I ever have imagined that you, with your high spirits and merry temperament, and perpetual good-humour, had come through such trials? I

wonder that people never think of the mischief that is done by intermeddling——”

“Intermeddling?” said she proudly. “It wasn’t of intermeddling I had to complain: it was a downright conspiracy—it was false stories—I was deceived by those who professed to be my best friends. There is intermeddling and intermeddling. You might say I was intermeddling in the case of my nephew. But what harm can come of that? It is not lies, it is the truth, I want to have told him. And even if it causes him some pain, it will be for his good. Don’t you think I am right?”

He hesitated.

“I hope so,” he said. “But you know things wear such a different complexion according to the way you look at them——”

“But facts, Lord Musselburgh, facts,” she persisted. “Do you think a man like George Morris would be affected by any sentimental considerations one way or the other? Won’t he find out just the truth? And that is all I honestly want Vin to know—the actual truth: then let him go on with his eyes open if he chooses. Facts, Lord Musselburgh: who can object to facts?” Then she said—as she gave him her hand that he might assist her to rise—

“We must be thinking of getting back home now, for if we are late for lunch, those Drexel girls will be grinning at each other like a couple of fiends.”

Rather reluctantly he rose also, and accompanied her. They made their way across a series of rough, bracken-covered knolls projecting into the sea until they reached the little bay that is known as Port Bân; and here, either the beauty and solitude of the place tempted them, or they were determined to defy sarcasm, for instead of hastening home, they quietly strolled up and down the smooth cream-white beach, now and again picking up a piece of rose-red seaweed, or turning over a limpet-shell, or watching a sandpiper making his quick little runs alongside the clear, crisp-curling ripples. They did not speak; they were as silent as the transparent blue shadows that their figures cast on the soft-yielding surface on which they walked. And sometimes Lord Musselburgh seemed inclined to write something, with the point of his stick, on that flawless sand; and then again he desisted; and still they continued silent.

She took up a piece of pink seaweed, and began pulling it to shreds. He was standing by, looking on.

"Don't you think," said he at last, "that there should be a good deal of sympathy—a very unusual sympathy—between two people who have come through the same suffering?"

"Oh, I suppose so," she said, with affected carelessness—her eyes still bent on the seaweed.

"Do you know," said he, again, "that I haven't the least idea what your name is!"

"My name? Oh, my name is Madge," she answered.

"Madge?" said he. "I wonder if you make the capital *M* this way?" and therewith he traced on the sand an ornamental *M* in the manner of the last century.

"No, I don't," she said, "but it is very pretty. How do you write the rest?"

Thus encouraged, he made bold to add the remaining letters, and seemed rather to admire his handiwork when it was done.

"By the way," she said, "I don't know your Christian name either!"

"Hubert."

"Can you write that in the same fashion?" she suggested, with a simple ingenuousness.

So, grown still bolder, he laboriously inscribed his name immediately underneath her own. But that was not all. When he had ended he drew a circle right round both names.

"That is a ring to enclose them," said he: and he turned from the scored names to regard her downcast face. "But—but I know a much smaller ring that could bring them still closer together. Will you let me try—Madge?"

He took her hand.

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

And then—Oh, very well, then: then—but after a reasonable delay—then they left those creamy sands, and went up by the edge of the blue-green turnip-field to the pathway, and so to the iron gate; and as he opened the gate for her, she said—

"Oh, I don't know what happened down there, and what I've pledged myself to; but at all events there will now be one more on my side, to help me about Vin, and get him out of all this sad trouble. You will help me, won't you—Hubert?"

Of course he was eager to promise anything.

"And you say he is sure to get in for Mendover? Why, just think of him now, with everything before him; and how nice it would be for all of us if he had a smart and clever wife, who would hold her own in society, and do him justice, and

make us all as proud and fond of her as we are of him. And just fancy the four of us setting out on a winter trip to Cairo or Jerusalem: wouldn't it be simply too delicious? The four of us—only the four of us—all by ourselves. Louie Drexel is rather young, to be sure; yet she knows her way about; she's sharp; she's clever; she will have some money; and she has cheek enough for anything. And by the way—Hubert—” said she (and always with a pretty little hesitation when she came to his Christian name) “I must really ask you—with regard to Louie Drexel—well—you know—you have been—just a little——”

He murmured something about the devotion of a lifetime—the devotion which he had just promised to her—being a very different thing from trivial drawing-room dallings; whereupon she observed—

“Oh, yes, men say so by way of excuse——”

“How many men have said so to you?” he demanded, flaring up.

“I did not say they had said so to *me*,” she answered sweetly. “Don't go and be absurdly jealous without any cause whatever. If any one has a right to be jealous, it is I, considering the way you have been going on with Louie Drexel. But of course if there's nothing in it, that's all well and done with; and I am of a forgiving disposition, when I'm taken the right way. Now about Vin: can you see anybody who would do better for him than Louie Drexel?”

Be sure it was not of Vin Harris, much as he was interested in him, that Lord Musselburgh wished to talk at this moment; but, on the other hand, in the first flush of his pride and gratitude, any whim of hers was law to him; and perhaps it was a sufficient and novel gratification to be able to call her Madge.

“I'm afraid,” said he, “that Vin is not the kind of person to have his life arranged for him by other people. And besides you must remember, Madge, dear, that you are assuming a great deal. You are assuming that you can show Vin that this old man is an impostor——”

“Oh, can there be any doubt of it!” she exclaimed. “Isn't the story you have told me yourself enough?”

Lord Musselburgh looked rather uncomfortable; he was a good-natured kind of person, and liked to think the best of everybody.

“I had no right to tell you that story,” said he.

"But now I have the right to know about that and everything else, haven't I—Hubert?" said she, with a pretty coyness.

"And besides," he continued, "Vin has a perfect explanation of the whole affair. There is no doubt the old man was just full of this subject, and believed he could write about it better than anyone else, even supposing the idea had occurred to some other person; he was anxious above all things that his poetical countrymen over there in the States and Canada should be done justice to; and when he heard that the volume was actually published he immediately declared that he would do everything in his power to help it——"

"But what about the £50—Hubert?"

"Oh, well," her companion said, rather uneasily, "I have told you that that was a gift from me to him. I did not stipulate for the publication of any book."

She considered for a moment; then she said, with some emphasis—

"And you think it no shame—you think it no monstrous thing—that our Vin should marry a girl who has been in the habit of going about with her grandfather while he begged money, and accepted money, from strangers? Is that the fate you wish for your friend?"

"No, I don't wish anything of the kind," said he, "if—if matters were so. But Vin and you look at these things in a very different light; and I can hardly believe that he has been so completely imposed on. I confess I liked the old man: I liked his splendid enthusiasm, his magnificent self-reliance, yes, and his Scotch plaid; and I thought the girl was remarkably beautiful—and more than that—refined and distinguished-looking—something unusual about her somehow——"

"Oh, yes, you are far too generous, Hubert," his companion said. "You accept Vin's representations without a word. But I see more clearly. And that little transaction about the book and the £50 gives me a key to the whole situation. You may depend on it, George Morris will find out what kind of person your grandiloquent old Scotchman is like. And then, when Vin's eyes are opened——"

"Yes, when Vin's eyes are opened?" her companion repeated.

"Then he will see into what a terrible pit he was nearly falling."

"Are you so sure of that?" Musselburgh said. "I know Vin a little. It isn't merely a pretty face that has taken his

fancy, as you yourself admit. If he has faith in that girl, it may not be easy to shake it."

"I should not attempt to shake it," she made answer at once, "if the girl was everything she ought to be, and of proper upbringing and surroundings. But even if it turned out that she was everything she should be, wouldn't it be too awful to have Vin dragged down into an alliance with that old—that old—oh, I don't know what to call him!——"

"Madge, dear," said he, "don't call him anything, until you learn more about him. And in the meantime," he continued, rather plaintively, "don't you think we might talk a little about ourselves, considering what has just happened?"

"There is such a long time before us to talk about ourselves," said she. "And you know—Hubert—you've come into our family, as it were; and you must take a share in our troubles."

They were nearing the house: five minutes more would bring them in sight of the open lawn.

"Wait a minute, Madge, dear," said he, and he halted by the side of a little bit of plantation. "Don't be in such a hurry. I wish to speak to you about——"

"About what?" she asked, with a smile.

"Oh, a whole heap of things! For example, do you want the Somervilles to know?"

"I don't particularly want them to know," she answered him, "but I fear they will soon find out."

"I should like you to tell Mrs. Somerville, anyway."

"Very well."

"Indeed, I don't care if all the people in the house knew!" said he, boldly.

"Hubert, what are you saying!" she exclaimed, with a fine simulation of horror. "My life would be made a burden to me! Fancy those Drexel girls: they would shriek with joy at the chance of torturing me! I should have to fly from the place. I should take the first train for the South to-morrow morning!"

"Really!" said he, with considerable coolness. "For I have been thinking that those names we printed on the sands——"

"That you printed, you mean!"

"—— were above high-water mark. Consequently they will remain there for some little time. Now it is highly probable that some of our friends may be walking along to Port

Bân this afternoon; and if they were to catch sight of those hieroglyphics——”

“Hubert,” said she, with decision. “You must go along immediately after luncheon and score them out. I would not for the world have those Drexel girls suspect what has happened!”

“Won’t you come with me, Madge, after luncheon?”

“Oh, we can’t be haunting those sands all day like a couple of sea-gulls!”

“But I think you might come!” he pleaded.

“Very well,” said she, “I suppose I must begin with obedience.”

And yet they seemed in no hurry to get on to the house. A robin perched himself on the wire fence not four yards away, and jerked his head, and watched them with his small, black, lustrous eye. A weasel came trotting down the road, stopped, looked, and glided noiselessly into the plantation. Two wood-pigeons went swiftly across an opening in the trees; a large hawk soared far overhead. On this still Sunday morning there seemed to be no one abroad; and then these two had much to say about a ring, and a locket, and similar weighty matters. Moreover, there was the assignation about the afternoon to be arranged.

But at length they managed to tear themselves away from this secluded place; they went round by the front of the big grey building; and in so doing had to pass the dining-room window.

“Oh my gracious goodness!” Mrs. Ellison exclaimed—and in no simulated horror this time. “They’re all in at lunch, every one of them, and I don’t know how long they mayn’t have been in! What shall I do!”

And then a sudden thought seemed to strike her.

“Hubert, my headache has come back! I’m going up to my room. Will you give my excuses to Mrs. Somerville? I’d a hundred times rather starve than—than be found out.”

“Oh, that is all nonsense!” said he—but in an undertone, for they were now in the spacious stone-paved hall. “Go to your room, if you like; and I’ll tell Mrs. Somerville, and she’ll send you up something. You mustn’t starve, for you’re going round with me to Port Bân in the afternoon.”

And, of course, the gentle hostess was grieved to hear that her friend had not yet got rid of her headache; and she herself went forthwith to Mrs. Ellison’s room, to see what would most

readily tempt the appetite of the poor invalid. The poor invalid was at her dressing-table, taking off her bonnet. She wheeled round.

"I am so sorry, dear, about your headache—" her hostess was beginning, when the young widow went instantly to the door and shut it. Then she came back; and there was a most curious look—of laughter, perhaps—in her extremely pretty eyes.

"Never mind about the headache!" she said to her astonished friend, who saw no cause for this amused embarrassment, nor yet for the exceedingly affectionate way in which both her hands had been seized. "The headache is gone. I've—I've something else to tell you—oh, you'd never guess it in the world! My dear, my dear!" she cried in a whisper, and her tell-tale eyes were full of confusion as well as laughter. "You'd never guess—but—but I've gone and made a fool of myself for the second time!"

CHAPTER XI.

"HOLY PALMER'S KISS."

THIS was a bright and cheerful afternoon in November; and old George Bethune and his granddaughter were walking down Regent-street. A brilliant afternoon, indeed; and the scene around them was quite gay and animated; for the wintry sunlight was shining on the big shop-fronts, and on the busy pavements, and on the open carriages that rolled by with their occupants gorgeous in velvet and silk and fur. Nor was George Bethune moved to any spirit of envy by all this display of luxury and wealth; no more than he was oppressed by any sense of solitariness amid this slow-moving, murmuring crowd. He walked with head erect; he paid but little heed to the passers-by; he was singing aloud, and that in a careless and florid fashion—

"The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,
Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the ferry,
The ship rides by the Berwick Law,
And I maun leave my bonnie Mary."

But suddenly he stopped: his attention had been caught by

a window, or rather a series of windows, containing all sorts of Scotch articles and stuffs.

"Maisrie," said he, as his eye ran over these varied wares and fabrics, "couldn't you—couldn't you buy some little bit of a thing?"

"Why, grandfather?" she asked.

"Oh, well," he answered, with an air of lofty indifference, "it is but a trifle—but a trifle; only I may have told you that my friend Carmichael is a good Scot—good friend and good Scot are synonymous terms, to my thinking—and—and as you are going to call on him for the first time, you might show him you are not ashamed of your country. Isn't there something there, Maisrie?" he continued, still regarding the articles in the window. "Some little bit of tartan ribbon—something you could put round your neck—whatever you like—merely to show that you fly your country's colours, and are not ashamed of them—"

"But why should I pretend to be Scotch, grandfather, when I am not Scotch?" she said.

He was not angry; he was amused.

"You—not Scotch? You, of all people in the world, not Scotch? What are you, then? A Bethune of Balloray—ay, and if justice were done, the owner and mistress of Balloray, Ballingean, and Cadzow—and yet you are not Scotch? Where got you your name? What is your lineage—your blood—your right and title to the lands of Balloray and Ballingean? And I may see you there yet, Maisrie; I may see you there yet. Stranger things have happened. But come away now—we need not quarrel about a bit of ribbon—and I know Mr. Carmichael will receive you as his countrywoman even if you have not a shred of tartan about you."

Indeed he had taken no offence: once more he was marching along, with fearless eye and undaunted front, while he had resumed his gallant singing—

"But it's not the roar o' sea or shore
Wad mak' me langer wish to tarry,
Nor shouts o' war that's heard afar—
It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary!"

They went down to one of the big hotels in Northumberland Avenue; asked at the office for Mr. Carmichael; and after an immeasurable length of waiting were conducted to his room. Here Maisrie was introduced to a tall, fresh-coloured, angular-

boned man, who had shrewd grey eyes that were also good-humoured. Much too good-humoured they were in Maisrie's estimation, when they chanced to regard her grandfather: they seemed to convey a sort of easy patronage, almost a kind of good-natured pity, that she was quick to resent. But how could she interfere? These were business matters that were being talked of; and she sate somewhat apart, forced to listen, but not taking any share in the conversation.

Presently, however, she heard something that startled her out of this apathetic concurrence, and set all her pulses flying. The tall, raw-boned, newspaper proprietor, eyeing this proud-featured old man with a not unkindly scrutiny, was referring to the volume on the Scottish Poets in America which George Bethune had failed to bring out in time; and his speech was considerate.

"It is not the first case of forestalling I have known," said he; "and it must just be looked on as a bit of bad luck. Better fortune next time. By the way, there is another little circumstance connected with that book—perhaps I should not mention it—but I will be discreet. No names; and yet you may like to hear that you have got another friend somewhere—somewhere in the background—"

It was at this point that Maisrie began to listen, rather breathlessly.

"Oh, yes, your friend—your unknown friend—wanted to be generous enough," Mr. Carmichael continued. "He wrote to me saying he understood that I had advanced a certain sum towards the publication of the work; and he went on to explain that as certain things had happened to prevent your bringing it out, he wished to be allowed to refund the money. Oh, yes, a very generous offer; for all was to be done in the profoundest secrecy; you were not to know anything about it, lest you should be offended. And yet it seemed to me you should be glad to learn that there was some one interesting himself in your affairs."

The two men were not looking at the girl: they could not see the pride and gratitude that were in her eyes. "And Vincent never told me a word," she was saying to herself, with her heart beating warm and fast. But that was not the mood in which old George Bethune took this matter. A dark frown was on his shaggy eyebrows.

"I do not see what right anyone has to intermeddle," said he, in tones that fell cruelly on Maisrie's ear, "still less to pay

money for me on the assumption that I had forgotten, or was unwilling to discharge, a just debt——"

"Come, come, come, Mr. Bethune," said the newspaper proprietor, with a sort of condescending good-nature, "you must not take it that way. To begin with, he did not pay any money at all. I did not allow him. I said 'Thank you; but this is a private arrangement between Mr. Bethune and myself; and if he considers there is any indebtedness, then he can wipe that off by contributions to the *Chronicle*.' So you see you have only to thank him for the intention——"

"Oh, very well," said the old man, changing his tone at once. "No harm in that. No harm whatever. Misplaced intention—but—but creditable. And now," he continued, in a still lighter strain, "since you mention the *Chronicle*, Mr. Carmichael, I must tell you of a scheme I have had for some time in mind. It is a series of papers on the old ballads of Scotland—or rather the chief of them—taking one for each weekly article, giving the different versions, with historical and philological notes. What do you think of that, now? Look at the material—the finest in the world!—the elemental passions, the tragic situations that are far removed from any literary form or fashion, that go straight to the heart and the imagination. Each of them a splendid text!" he proceeded, with an ever-increasing enthusiasm. "Think of *Edom o' Gordon*, and the *Wife of Usher's Well*, and the *Baron of Brackla*; *Annie of Lochryan*, *Hynde Etin*, the piteous cry of '*Helen of Kirkconnell*,' and the *Rose of Yarrow* seeking her slain lover by bank and brae. And what could be more interesting than the collation of the various versions of those old ballads, showing how they have been altered here and there as they were said or sung, and how even important passages may have been dropped out in course of time and transmission. Look, for example, at '*Barbara Allan*.' The version in *Percy's Reliques* is as bad and stupid as it can be; but it is worse than that: it is incomprehensible. Who can believe that the maiden came to the bedside of her dying lover only to flout and jeer, and that for no reason whatever? And when she sees his corpse

'With scornful eye she looked downe,
Her cheek with laughter swellin'—'

Well, I say that is not true," he went on vehemently; "it never was true: it contradicts human nature; it is false, and

bad, and impossible. But turn to our Scottish version! When Sir John Graeme o' the West Countrie, lying sore sick, sends for his sweetheart, she makes no concealment of the cause of the feud that has been between them—of the wrong that is rankling at her heart:

‘O dinna ye mind, young man,’ said she,
 ‘When the red wine ye were filling,
 That ye made the healths gae round and round,
 And slighted Barbara Allan?’

And proud and indignant she turns away. There is no sham laughter here; no impossible cruelty; but a quarrel between two fond lovers that becomes suddenly tragic, when death steps in to prevent the possibility of any reconciliation.

He turned his face unto the wa',
 And death was with him dealing:
 ‘Adieu, adieu, my dear friends a’,
 Be kind to Barbara Allan!’

Can anything be more simple, and natural, and inexpressibly sad as well? It is the story of a tragic quarrel between two true lovers: it is *not* the impossible and preposterous story of a giggling hoyden grinning at a corpse!”

And here it was probable that old George Bethune, having warmed to his subject, and being as usual wildly enamoured of his latest scheme, would have gone on to give further instances of the value of collation and comparison, but that Mr. Carmichael was forced to interrupt. The proprietor of the *Edinburgh Chronicle* was a busy man during his brief visits to town.

“Very well, Mr. Bethune,” said he. “I think your idea a very good one—an excellent one, in fact, for the weekly edition of a Scotch paper; and I will give you *carte blanche* as to the number of articles. Who knows,” he added, with a condescending smile, “but that they may grow to a book—to take the place of the one that was snatched out of your hands?”

And again, as his visitors were leaving, he said in the same good-humoured way—

“I presume it is not necessary for us to discuss the question of terms, especially before a young lady. If you have been satisfied with us so far—”

“I am quite content to leave that with you: quite,” interposed the old man, with some little dignity.

“I was only going to say,” Mr. Carmichael resumed, “that a series of articles such as you suggest may require a good deal

of research and trouble: so that, when the reckoning comes, I will see you are put on the most favoured nation scale. And not a word more about the American book: we were disappointed—that is all."

This latter admonition was wholly unnecessary. When George Bethune got out into the street again, with Maisrie as his sole companion and confidante, it was not of that lost opportunity he was talking, it was all of this new project that had seized his imagination. They had to make one or two calls, in the now gathering dusk; but ever, as they came out again into the crowded thoroughfares, he returned to the old ballads and the opportunities they presented for a series of discursive papers. And Maisrie was about as eager in anticipation as himself.

"Oh, yes, grandfather," she said, "you could not have thought of a happier subject. And you will begin at once, grandfather, won't you? Do you think I shall be able to help you in the very least way?—it would please me so much if I could search out things for you, or copy, or help you in the smallest way. And I know it will be a labour of love for you; it will be a constant delight; and all the more that the days are getting short now, and we shall have to be more indoors. And then you heard what Mr. Carmichael said, grandfather; and if he is going to pay you well for these articles, you will soon be able to give him back the money he advanced to you about that unfortunate book—"

"Oh, don't you bother about such things!" he said, with an impatient frown. "When I am planning out an important work, I don't want to be reminded that it will result in merely so many guineas. That is not the spirit in which I enter upon such an undertaking. When I write, it is not with an eye to the kitchen. Unless some nobler impulse propels, then be sure the result will be despicable. However, I suppose women are like that; when you are thinking of the literature of your native land—of perhaps adding some little tributary wreath—they are looking towards grocers' bills. The kitchen—the kitchen is before them—not the dales and vales of Scotland, where lovers loved, and were broken-hearted. The kitchen—"

But Maisrie was not disconcerted by this rebuke.

"And you will begin at once, grandfather," she said, cheerfully. "Oh, I know it will be so delightful an occupation for you. And I don't wonder that Mr. Carmichael was glad to have such a chance. Then it won't involve any expense of travelling,

like the other book you thought of, about the Scotland of Scotch songs. The winter evenings won't be so dull, grandfather, when you have this to occupy you; you will forget it is winter altogether, when you are busy with those beautiful scenes and stories. And will you tell Vincent this evening, grandfather? he will be so interested: it will be something to talk of at dinner."

But Vincent was to hear of this great undertaking before then. When Maisrie and her grandfather reached the door of their lodgings, he said to her—

"You can go in now, Maisrie, and have the gas lit. I must walk along to the library, and see what books they have; but I'm afraid I shall have to get Motherwell, and Pinkerton, and Allan Cunningham, and the rest of them from Scotland. Aytoun they are sure to have, I suppose."

So they parted for the moment; and Maisrie went upstairs and lit the gas in the little parlour. Then, without taking off her bonnet, she sate down and fell into a reverie—not a very sad one, as it seemed. She was sitting thus absorbed in silent fancies, when a familiar sound outside startled her into attention; she sprang to her feet; the next instant the door was opened; the next again she was advancing to the tall and handsome young stranger who stood somewhat diffidently there, and both her hands were outstretched, and a light of joy and gratitude was shining in her eyes.

"Oh, Vincent, I am so glad you have come over!" she said, in a way that was far from usual with her, and she held both his hands for more than a second or two, and her grateful eyes were fixed on his without any thought of embarrassment. "I was thinking of you. You have been so kind—so generous! I wanted to thank you, and I am so glad to have the chance—"

"But what is it, Maisrie?—I'm sure there is nothing you have to thank me for!" said he, as he shut the door behind him, and came forward, and took a seat not very far away from her. He was a little bewildered. In her sudden access of gratitude, when she took both his hands in hers, she had come quite close to him; and the scent of a sandal-wood necklace that she wore seemed to touch him as with a touch of herself. He knew those fragrant beads; more than once he had perceived the slight and subtle odour, as she passed him, or as he helped her on with her cloak; and he had come to associate it with her, as if it were part of her, some breathing thing, that could touch, and thrill. And this time it had come so near—

But that bewilderment of the senses lasted only for a moment. Maisrie Bethune was not near to him at all: she was worlds and worlds away. It was not a mere whiff of perfume that could bring her near to him. Always to him she appeared to be strangely unapproachable and remote. Perhaps it was the loneliness of her position, perhaps it was the uncertainty of her future, and those vague possibilities of which her grandfather had spoken, or perhaps it was the reverence of undivided and unselfish love on his part; but at all events she seemed to live in a sort of sacred and mysterious isolation—to be surrounded by a spell which he dared not seek to break by any rude contact. And yet surely her eyes were regarding his with sufficient frankness and friendliness, and even more than friendliness, now as she spoke.

"This afternoon we called on Mr. Carmichael," said Maisrie, "Mr. Carmichael of the *Edinburgh Chronicle*. He told us someone had offered to repay the money he had advanced to my grandfather on account of that American book: and though he did not mention any name, do you think I did not know who it was, Vincent? Be sure I knew—in a moment! And you never said a word about it! I might never have known but for this accident—I might never have had the chance of thanking you—as—as I should like to do now—only—only it isn't quite easy to say everything one feels—"

"Oh, but that is nothing at all, Maisrie!" said he, coming quickly to her rescue. "You have nothing to thank me for—nothing! It is true I made the offer; but it was not accepted; and why should I say anything about it to you?"

"Ah, but the intention is enough," said she (for she knew nothing about his having paid Lord Musselburgh the £50). "And you cannot prevent my being very, very grateful to you for such thoughtfulness and kindness. To save my grandfather's self-respect—to prevent him being misunderstood by—by strangers—because—because he is so forgetful: do you think, Vincent, I cannot see your motive, and be very, very grateful? And never saying a word, too! You should have told me, Vincent! But I suppose that was still further kindness—you thought I might be embarrassed—and not able to thank you—which is just the case—"

"Oh, Maisrie, don't make a fuss about nothing!" he protested.

"I know whether it is nothing or not," said she, proudly. "And—and perhaps if you had lived as we have lived—"

wandering from place to place—you would set more store by an act of friendship. Friends are little to you—you have too many of them—”

“Oh, Maisrie, don’t talk like that!” he said. “You make me ashamed. What have I done?—nothing! I wish there was some real thing I could do to prove my friendship for your grandfather and yourself—then you might see—”

“Haven’t you proved it every day, every hour almost, since ever we have known you?” she said, in rather a low voice.

“Ah, well, perhaps there may come a chance—” said he; and then he stopped short; for here was old George Bethune, with half-a-dozen volumes under his arm, and himself all eagerness and garrulity about his new undertaking.

At the little dinner that evening in the restaurant, there was quite an unusual animation, and that not solely because this was the ninth of November, and they were proposing to go out later on and look at the illuminations in the principal thoroughfares. Vincent thought he had never seen Maisrie Bethune appear so light-hearted and happy; and she was particularly kind to him; when she regarded him, there still seemed to be a mild gratitude shining in the clear and eloquent deeps of her eyes. Gratitude for what!—he asked himself, with a touch of scorn. It was but an ordinary act of acquaintanceship: why should this beautiful, sensitive, proud-spirited creature have to debase herself to thank him for such a trifle? He felt ashamed of himself. It was earning gratitude by false pretences. The very kindness shining there in her eyes was a sort of reproach: what had he done to deserve it? Ah, if she only knew what he was ready to do—when occasion offered?

And never before had he seen Maisrie so bravely confident about any of her grandfather’s literary projects.

“You see, Vincent,” she said, as if he needed any convincing, when she was satisfied! “in the end it will make a far more interesting book than the Scotch-American one; and in the meantime there will be the series of articles appearing from week to week, to attract attention to the subject. And then, although grandfather says I take a low and mercenary view of literature, all the same I am glad he is to be well paid for the articles; and there are to be as many as he likes; and when they are completed, then comes the publication of the book, which should be as interesting to Mr. Carmichael, or Lord Musselburgh, or anyone, as the Scotch-American volume. And grandfather is going

to begin at once; and I am asking him whether I cannot be of any use to him, in the humblest way. A glossary, grandfather; you must have a glossary of the Scotch words: couldn't I compile that for you?"

"I have been wondering," the old man said, absently, and without answering her question, "since I came into this room, whether it would be possible to classify them into ballads of action and ballads of the supernatural. I imagine the former belong more to the south country; and that most of the latter had their origin in the north. And yet even in the Battle of Otterburn, the Douglas says

'But I hae dreamed a dreary dream,
Ayont the Isle o' Skye,—
I saw a deid man win a fight,
And I think that man was I.'

Well, that may have been an interpolation; at all events, it is a Highland touch; the strong, brisk, matter-of-fact Border ballad has seldom anything of that kind in it. The bold Buccleuch and Kinmont Willie were too much in the saddle to have time for wraiths. You remember, Maisrie, when they brought word to 'the bauld Keeper' that Kinmont Willie was a captive in Carlisle Castle?—

He has ta'en the table wi' his hand,
He garred the red wine spring on hie—
'Now a curse upon my head,' he cried,
'But avenged on Lord Scroop I'll be!

O is my basnet a widow's curch,
Or my lance a wand of the willow tree,
Or my arm a lady's lily hand,
That an English lord should lichtly me?"

That is more like the ballad of the south: sharp and vivid, full of action and spirit, and the audacious delight of life: when you want mystery and imagination and supernatural terrors you must turn to the brooding and darkened regions of the north. The Demon Lover is clearly of northern origin; its hell is the Scandinavian hell; not the fiery furnace of the eastern mind, but a desolation of cold and wet.

'O what'n a mountain's yon,' she said,
'Sae dreary wi' frost and snow?'
'O yon is the mountain o' hell,' he cried,
'Where you and I maun go!'"

"The Demon Lover?" said Maisrie, inquiringly; and Vincent could not but notice how skilfully and sedulously she fanned the old man's interest in this new scheme by herself pretending to be deeply interested.

"Don't you know it, Maisrie?" said he. "It is the story of two lovers who were parted; and he returns after seven years to claim the fulfilment of her vows; and finds that in his absence she has taken someone else for her husband. It is a dangerous position—if he wishes her to go away with him; for a woman never forgets her first lover; what is more, she attributes all the natural and inevitable disillusionment of marriage to her husband, whilst the romance attaching to her first love remains undimmed. Therefore, I say, let Auld Robin Gray beware!—the wife is not always so loyal to the disillusioniser as was the Jeannie of the modern song. Well, in this case, she who has been a false sweetheart, proves a false wife—

'If I was to leave my husband dear,
And my twa babes also,
O where is it you would tak' me to,
If I with thee should go?'

And the lover becomes the avenger; together they sail away on a strange ship, until they descry the mountains of hell; and the lover turned demon, warns her of her doom.

And aye when she turned her round about,
Aye taller he seemed for to be,
Until that the tops o' that gallant ship
Nae taller were than he.

He struck the topmast wi' his hand,
The foremost wi' his knee;
And he brak that gallant ship in twain,
And sank her in the sea."

"Will there be illustrations, sir?" asked Vincent (in humble imitation of Maisrie). "And an *édition de luxe*? For that, I imagine, is where my co-operation might come in. Maisrie seems so anxious to help; and I should like to take my part too."

"It is a far cry to the completion of such an undertaking as that," said the old man, rather wistfully.

But Maisrie would not have him lapse into any despondent mood.

"You must not look so far ahead, grandfather," she said,

cheerfully. "You must think of your own pride and satisfaction in beginning it; and I know you will be delighted; for who can do it as well as you? And if I am so very mercenary, I can't help it; only I shall be all the better pleased to remember that you are being properly paid for your work. Supposing the kitchen is my department?—Oh, very well!—somebody must look to that. It will be a labour of love for you, grandfather, all the way through; and then, when the book is nearing completion, just think of the pride you will have in choosing someone, some distinguished person, for the dedication. It will be far more your own work than merely giving specimens of the Scottish-American poets; indeed it will be all your own; for the ballads are only to be texts, as you say. And I think we should go home now, and you will look over some of the books. I don't care about the illuminations—not I. What is the Lord Mayor's Day to Vincent or me—when you might be telling us about Katherine Janfarie and May Collean?"

"No, no, Maisrie," said he, as he rose from the table. "Give me a little time for preparation. We promised to show you the streets lit up. And mind you wrap yourself well, Maisrie, for the evenings are getting cold now."

But little did Vincent Harris, as he helped her on with her cloak, and made ready to go out into the dusky and glaring thoroughfares, foresee what was going to befall him that night.

When they issued forth into Regent-street, there was as yet no very dense crowd, though here and there the front of a tall building flamed in yellow fire; but nevertheless Maisrie said—

"We must not get separated, grandfather. Let me go between you two; and I will take your arm on the one side and Vincent's on the other; and if we have occasionally to go side ways, we can always keep together."

"Oh, I shan't let you be dragged away, Maisrie," the younger man said. "And if you don't mind, I think this will be a better way of holding on to you—" and therewith he made bold to pass his hand underneath the hanging sleeve of her cloak, and there he took hold of her arm from the inside—rather timidly, perhaps, but then his grasp could be tightened, if needs were.

"Yes," said she, placidly, and she made a little movement as though she would draw both her companions closer to her. "This is very comfortable. Which way, grandfather?"

And so the little group of friends, knit together by many

intimate interests and much association, adventured out into the great world of London that was all astir now with a vague and half-subdued excitement. There was no need for them to talk; they had but to look at the blazing stars, and feathers, and initial letters, and to make their way through the murmuring throng. There was no jostling; the crowd was entirely good-natured; and if these three could not always go abreast, they then went diagonally for a second or so, and were not separated. Of course, Vincent had to hold Maisrie a little more firmly now; his arm was parallel with hers, and his hand had hold of her wrist; and there was an intoxicating sense of warmth as well as of close companionship in this mutual clinging. Thus they slowly and idly passed away down Regent-street, well content with their own silence and the brilliant sights around them. Then a little incident occurred. A vehicle was coming along one of the smaller thoroughfares they had to cross; there was a brief bit of a scrimmage; and Maisrie, the better to keep hold of her companion, slipped her hand from the muff that was slung round her neck, and seized his hand, that was ready enough, be sure, to respond. They got over without further trouble; they mixed once more in this vast, slow-moving assemblage—only he retained the hand she had given him, and that with no uncertain grasp.

It was a wonderful, mysterious, secret thing to be happening in the midst of all this great, careless, dusky crowd. Her hand, that was ungloved, was soft and warm after coming out of its cosy resting-place; and it was not likely to get cold, when it was held so tight, under the concealment of the hanging sleeve. And then—well, probably the girl did not know what she was doing; she was affected by all this excitement around her; it was “Look, grandfather, look!” from time to time; most likely she thought no more of her hand being held than if she were crossing a meadow in the spring-time with some careless girl-companion—but however that may be, what must she do but open her fingers, so that his should interclasp with hers! Nay, she opened them again, and shut them again, the better to adjust that gentle clasp; and every touch thrilled through him, so that he walked as one in a dream. He dared hardly breathe, he durst not speak, lest some stray word of his might startle her into consciousness, and shatter this miracle. She did not seem to be in the least aware: it was “Which way, grandfather?” or “Take care, grandfather!” and her eyes were turned to the brilliant and parti-coloured devices in front of the

Pall Mall clubs, and not at all to the handsome lad who walked so close to her that now and again he could detect some faint trace of the odour of sandal-wood that seemed to hover around her neck and her hair. What did he see or hear of the crowd now, or of the garish lights along the houses? He walked in an enchanted land: there were only two people in it: and they were bound together, in subtle intercommunion, by this magic grasp. There was wonder as well as joy in his mind; the sensation was so new and strange. Did he remember that "palm to palm" was "holy palmer's kiss"? No, he remembered nothing; he only knew that he held Maisrie's hand interlocked with his, in this secret fashion; and that all the wild phantasmagoria around them was something unreal and visionary with which neither he nor she had any concern.

And even now his cup of bliss and bewilderment was not yet full, on this marvellous night. When at last they drew away from the crowded streets and found themselves in quieter thoroughfares on their way home, the old man drew a breath of relief.

"This is better, Maisrie," he said. "It seems as if we had been out on a roaring sea, and had at length drifted into stillness and peace."

"And we were not separated once, grandfather," said she, cheerfully. "Not once all the time."

And then it was Vincent who spoke.

"I don't see why we should ever separate," said he. "Friends are few enough in this world."

"Yes, indeed, good friends are few," Maisrie said; and therewithal—ere he could tell what was happening—she had taken his hand that she held in hers and raised it, and for one brief moment pressed it against her heart. The little impulsive movement—of gratitude perhaps; perhaps of affection; perhaps of both combined—could not have been perceived by any passer-by; and yet the young man seemed to be struck by a sudden shock of fear; he could not speak; his own heart was beating so that speech was impossible. For it appeared to him in that swift second as if the scales had fallen from his eyes. To him she was no longer an elusive phantom—a mirage—a vision—pensive, and mysterious, and remote; now he saw her a beautiful young creature of flesh and blood, whose hands and heart were warm, who could cling for help and companionship and sympathy, who was not afraid to speak and act, when love or gratitude prompted her. No longer the strangely isolated

maiden: the unapproachable had all at once come near; so near that the scent of sandal-wood touched him from time to time; so near that her soft fingers were interclasped with his, pulsating there, nestling there, not relaxing their hold, nor inclined to do that. This was no piece of statuary, to be worshipped from afar: this was Maisrie Bethune, whose arm lay close and caressing against his, under the friendly shelter of that hanging sleeve, whose step went with his step as they walked together, whose breathing he could almost overhear, in the silence of this gracious night. And what had she not confessed, in that artless way?

And then amid his bewilderment and breathless exultation a horrid fancy shot across his brain. Perhaps that was no confession at all; but a quite simple, unpremeditated, even unconscious, act of mere friendliness and sympathy? Did she know that she had done it? Would she repeat it? Would she give him further assurance? Might she not herself wish to be certain that he had understood—that he had received a message that was to change all his life?

Well, he had hold of her hand. Gently and with trembling and eager touch he tried to raise it—he would have her replace his own hand where that had been for one delirious moment: perhaps to ask if her heart had still, and for ever and always, the same message to send. Alas! she did not yield to the mute invitation. Perhaps she did not comprehend it. For here they were at the corner of the little street in which they lived; and she unclasped her fingers, so that his also might be released from their too happy imprisonment; and she was talking to her grandfather when the door of the house was reached. Nor did her eyes say anything as he bade her good-bye for the night. Perhaps it was all a mistake, then?—some little involuntary act of kindness, and nothing more?

CHAPTER XII.

INTERPOSITION.

YES, she had come near—so near that she seemed to absorb his very life. He could think of nothing but her. As he walked away down through the dark streets, he imagined her to be still by his side; he tried to fancy he could detect some faint perfume

of sandal-wood in the surrounding air; his right hand tingled yet with the touch of her warm, interclasping fingers. And if at one moment his heart beat high with the assurance that she had confessed her love and given herself to him, the next he tortured himself with vague alarms, and wondered how the long night was to be got through, before he could go up to her in the morning, and challenge her to speak. All the future was filled with her; and there again he saw himself by her side, her strong and confident protector. And yet if he had mistaken that mute declaration of hers? What if, after all, it were merely a timid expression, involuntary and unpremeditated, of her friendship, her kindness, her gratitude?

Well, he knew he could get no confirmation of either his audacious hopes or his depressing fears until the next day; and as the alternation between the two moods was altogether a maddening thing, he resolved to seek relief and distraction. As soon as he got to his own room down in Grosvenor Place he took out a foolscap sheet of paper which had certain pencillings on it. These formed, in fact, an outline sketch of a lecture which he had undertaken to deliver before the Mendover Free Library Association; and it was high time he was getting on with it, for the meeting was to be held in the following week. But strange things happened with this sheet of paper. Apparently the pencilled heading was "*The Unscrupulousness of Wealth*;" but the longer he looked at the title, the more clearly did it spell out "*Maisrie Bethune*." The sub-headings, too, began to reveal hidden mysteries. Here was one which on the face of it read "*Circumstances in which the capitalist may become a tyrant in spite of himself*." But behold! that scrawl slowly disappeared, and in its place a picture grew into existence. He seemed to recognise the big grey building—was it not the mansion-house of Balloray?—and well he knew the figure of the tall young girl with the long-flowing hair who, in riding-habit, came out on to the terrace, above the wide stone steps. Is that her grandfather, proud-featured, lion-hearted, with the same undaunted demeanour as of old, come to wave her good-bye? The splendour of the morning is all around her; there is a white road outside the grounds, and an avenue of beech trees dappled with sun and shade; when she vanishes into that wonderland of foliage, she seems to take the light of the day away with her. And again, what further miracle is this? Another vision interposes, and at length becomes dominant; and this one is very different; this one is of a street in Toronto.

And here also is a young girl; but now she is all in black; and she is alone—she knows not one of those passers-by. Pale and pensive she walks on; her eyes are downcast; perhaps she is thinking of wide intervening seas, and of her loneliness, and of one who used to be her friend. Tears?—but of what avail are these, here in this strange city?—they are only a confession of helplessness—perhaps of despair . . .

Vincent Harris got up and walked about the room: at this rate the members of the Mendover Free Library Association were not likely to receive much instruction. And indeed he did not return to that sheet of foolscap; his brain could conjure up quite sufficient visions of the future without having recourse to any palimpsest discoveries; while as for his hand—well, perhaps the hand that Maisrie had held over her heart for one wild, startling moment, was a little too unsteady to use a pencil. If only the hours would go by! He tried to read—and could not. He got hold of a map of Scotland, and traced out the line of travel he should like to follow if Maisrie and her grandfather and himself should ever start on their long-projected tour. He turned to a map of the United States, and sought out Omaha: Maisrie's birthplace was not distinguished by any difference of type, and yet he regarded those five letters with a curious interest and fascination. He recalled his having stood on the heights of Council Bluffs, and looked across the yellow Missouri; and now he marvelled that he could have contemplated the wide, straggling city with comparative indifference. Perhaps, by diligent seeking on the morrow—for the capital of Nebraska is an important place—he might even in London discover a photograph or two to put on his mantelshelf; and then he could stand opposite them and say, "Why, Maisrie must have passed that railway station many a time!" or "Maisrie must often have looked up to the spire of the High School, there on the hill." To think that he had been twice in Omaha—without caring—without knowing! And so his eyes rested on this little word in the middle of the big map; but his imagination was far away.

Well, the longest night must have an end; and yet the new dawn brought no surcease to his anxieties; for how was he to have an opportunity of speaking with Maisrie alone? He was up in the little Mayfair street betimes; and made some pretence of beginning work; but that was soon abandoned. He could not keep his eyes on any book or paper when there were those two windows over the way. When would she appear there

to water the chrysanthemums in the little balcony? If she accidentally caught sight of him, might not some tell-tale flush reveal all he wanted to know? Or she might be coming out on some errand—so that he could quickly follow her? Or perhaps her grandfather might be going to the library, leaving her at home by herself? The door of the house opposite grew to be as fascinating as the windows; unknown possibilities might be sprung upon him at any moment.

It was quite a cheerful morning—for London in November. If pale mists hung about the thoroughfares, at least some trace of blue was discernible overhead; and on the panes of the higher windows the sunlight shone here and there a dull gleaming gold. The butcher's boy whistled loudly as he marched by; the cabman flicked at his horse out of mere good humour; the ostlers in the adjacent mews made merry with bandied jests. It seemed too fine a morning for the collation of Scotch ballads; and so indeed it proved to be; for about eleven o'clock the door across the way was opened, and out came Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter into the wintry sunlight. Maisrie did not look up. The two were talking together as they went along the little thoroughfare and turned into Park Street. The next moment Vincent had snatched up his hat and gloves, and was off in pursuit.

But he did not seek to overtake them. On the contrary, he kept as wide a space between them and him as he had done before he had ever dared to address them; and yet the distance was not so great but that he could observe Maisrie's every gesture and the graceful motion of every step. She wore those hanging sleeves, too, that had hidden his arm on the preceding night—those hanging sleeves that had allowed her to say something in secret to him, even amid the noise and movement of a great crowd. And now that he saw her actual self instead of the vague phantom of his reveries, he plucked up courage. Yes, she must have known what she was doing. Those were flesh and blood fingers that had taken hold of his; when she raised his hand to her heart, it could not have been altogether through inadvertence. Once or twice a wild fancy got into his head that here and now he would hasten forward, and seize her arm, as if by right, and say, 'Maisrie, there is no need of words between us: I am here at your side, and mean to remain here. Whatever that message meant, I claim you as mine.' And then again he drew back. What if there were some mistake! Hyde Park did not seem a fitting place for

explanations. And then, her grandfather might be more than astonished.

Yet hour after hour of this terrible day went by, and brought him no nearer to the discovery he longed for. When Maisrie and her grandfather returned from their stroll through the Park, the young man went back to the sheet of foolscap on which he meant to shadow forth the outlines of his lecture. The effort was absurd. He might keep his eyes mechanically fixed on the paper; but his brain refused to act. Industry—capital—the proposed resumption by the workers of the world of the mines, factories, docks, ships, canals, railways which their labour had constructed—the impracticability of land nationalisation—and so forth: what were these but mere lifeless phrases, when his heart was listening for the smallest sound on the other side of the street? And ill-luck pursued him. She did not come once to the window. The chrysanthemums in the little balcony were quite neglected. The afternoon passed, and neither she nor her grandfather came out alone. Then, when he went over as usual about half-past six, there was no chance of his speaking to her by herself; in fact, both she and her grandfather were seated at the one table, with a heap of books and papers before them.

"Enough, Maisrie, enough," Mr. Bethune said blithely, and he rose at once. "You have had your wish—though I don't see why you should undertake any such drudgery—"

She also rose to receive the visitor; and as she gave him her hand for a moment, and regarded him with very friendly eyes, there was not the least trace of self-consciousness in her manner.

"Yes," said she, with a bright and frank smile, "grandfather has conferred a new dignity on me. I am become his amanuensis. Not that I am the slightest real use to him, I suppose; it is only done to please me; still, I take it seriously, and pretend to be doing my share. Time to go, is it?—very well, I shall be ready in a minute."

He was amazed and mortified beyond measure by this perfect self-possession. Had nothing whatever happened the night before, then? There was no secret between them at all? She had made no confession—given him no message? And then wounded pride stepped in and spoke—with its usual violence and cruel injustice. Perhaps there were people who dispensed their caresses so freely that they thought nothing of them? What had startled him, a man, might be only a matter of course

to her, a girl? Nay,—for what will not a lover say in a passion of jealous anger and disappointment?—perhaps he was not the first nor the only one who had been similarly bewildered?

He had no word for Maisrie on her return to the room. When the three of them went out into the street, he forsook his usual post by her side, and walked with her grandfather, to whom he talked exclusively. And of course, as his questions were all about the projected compilation of ballads, and as old George Bethune was always keenly enthusiastic about any new undertaking, there was no stint to their conversation. Maisrie walked on in silence and unheeded. When they reached the restaurant, and as they were taking their seats at the little table, she glanced at the young man; but his eyes did not happen to meet hers. And there was no place for her in their talk.

“No,” old George Bethune was saying—and with considerable animation, for he appeared to have been looking over some of the ballads during the day, and his mind was still fired by the recollection of them, “I think they are beyond the reach of illustration, even if there should be an *édition de luxe*. I have considered your suggestion more than once; but I fear the drawing would in almost every instance be an anticlimax to the power and simplicity and pathos of the printed page. No picture could be as vivid and clear and striking as the verses themselves: why, just think of such lines as these—

‘Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
Nor blowing snaw’s inclemencie;
’Tis not sic cauld that makes me cry,
But my love’s heart grown cauld to me.
When we came in by Glasgow town,
We were a comely sight to see;
My love was clad i’ the black velvet,
And I myself in cramoisie.’

What picture could better that? What picture could do anything but weaken it? You remember in ‘Edom o’ Gordon’ how the young maiden is lowered from the burning tower only to be slain by Edom o’ Gordon’s spear—

‘They row’d her in a pair o’ sheets,
And tow’d her owre the wa’;
But on the point o’ Gordon’s spear
She gat a deadly fa’.

O bonnie, bonnie was her mouth,
 And cherry were her cheeks,
 And clear, clear was her yellow hair,
 Whereon the red blood dreeps.

Then wi' his spear he turned her owre;
 O but her face was wan!
 He said, "Ye are the first that e'er
 I wish'd alive again."

He turned her owre and owre again,
 O but her skin was white!
 "I might hae spared that bonnie face
 To hae been some man's delight.

"Busk and boun, my merry men a',
 For ill dooms I do guess;—
 I cannot look on that bonnie face
 As it lies on the grass,"—

What illustration could improve on that?—why, it burns clear as flame! Then, again, take the girl who was drowned by her sister in 'the bonnie mill-dams o' Balloray'——"

At this point the silent and neglected Maisrie suddenly looked up—glancing from her grandfather to the young man in a curiously appealing way. She seemed to say 'Grandfather, you forget: it is not Balloray, it is Binnorie;' and again 'Vincent, he has forgotten: that is all.' But neither of them took any notice of her; nay, the younger man, in his insensate indignation and disappointment, would not look her way at all; while old George Bethune, with his mind fixed on those imaginary pictures, went on in a rapt fashion to repeat certain of the verses—

"Ye couldna see her yellow hair,
 Balloray, O Balloray,
 For gowd and pearls that were sae rare,
 By the bonnie mill-dams o' Balloray.

Ye couldna see her middle sma',
 Balloray, O Balloray,
 Her gowden girdle was sae braw,
 By the bonnie mill-dams o' Balloray.

Ye couldna see her lily feet,
 Balloray, O Balloray,
 Her gowden fringes were sae deep,
 By the bonnie mill-dams o' Balloray.

'Sair will they be, whae'er they be,
 Balloray, O Balloray,
 The hearts that live to weep for thee!
 By the bonnie mill-dams o' Balloray!

"It is like a picture by one of the pre-Raphaelites," Vincent said; and then the old man proceeded to talk of paper and type and binding, as if the new work were just ready for press.

But silence was not to reign for ever between those two. On their way home Mr. Bethune was talking of "The Demon Lover," of its alleged Italian origin, and of a suggestion he had seen somewhere that it was no forsaken sweetheart who had come to tempt the wedded wife, but a fiend adopting that disguise. When they reached the little parlour he began to search about for the volume in which "The Demon Lover" was thus treated; but could not find it; whereupon he went off upstairs, to see if it was not among his books and papers there. As soon as he had gone, Maisrie rose and came over to where the young man was standing by the fireplace.

"What have I done, Vincent?" she said.

"Oh, nothing," he made answer, avoiding her eyes.

"I have a right to know," she said, proudly.

"It is nothing," said he. "I—I made a mistake; that is all."

She looked at him in mute reproach: then she turned away, and went back to her seat. There was a paper-knife on the table beside her; she took that into her hands, and began to finger it; her eyes were downcast; he was free to go now, when he chose.

But he did not go. On the contrary, after a second or two of vacillation, he followed her.

"Maisrie," said he, in a very different tone, "perhaps it's all a mistake on my part. If so, I am sorry. I don't want to vex you—"

"I don't want to vex you, Vincent," said she, in a somewhat low voice. "Tell me what it is."

"Well," said he, "I came here this afternoon thinking—hoping—there might be some more definite understanding between you and me: yes, I was hoping for much—and then—and then I found you quite careless and thoughtless, just as if nothing at all had happened last night——"

"Last night?" she repeated.

"Yes," said he, rather reproachfully. "Don't you remember what happened last night? Don't you know that you pressed my hand to your heart? But perhaps that was nothing—perhaps that meant nothing at all——"

"It meant a very great deal, Vincent," said she, warmly, looking up at him with honest eyes. "We were talking of

the value of true friends—and I could not say much—yet I wished to tell you what I thought of all your goodness and kindness. Indeed, indeed it meant a great deal, Vincent—and I hoped you would understand——”

“I have understood too much,” said he, and he was silent for a second. Then he went on. “I thought you had something more than that to say to me, Maisrie. For why need I tell you what you must have guessed already? You know I love you; you must have seen it all this time; there was no need for me to speak. And when the future has but the one hope for me, that some day or other you should be my wife, then perhaps I was too eager to believe it had all come true—that you were giving me a promise in that quiet way—and no need of a spoken word between us. But I was mistaken, I see. You only meant friendship. You only wanted to say ‘Thank you!’ to a friend——”

But by this time she had risen from her chair; and there was in her eyes the strangest look of pride, and joy, and perhaps, too, of sadness.

“Do you know what you are saying, Vincent?” she said, quite gently. “You—of all people in the world——”

She hesitated: she regarded, with admiring, and grateful, and affectionate eyes, this handsome lad on whom fortune had shed all good things—and perhaps she could not quite confess all she thought.

“You—of all people in the world—every one making much of you—every one hoping such great things of you—and you come seeking a wife *here*.” She glanced round at the shabby little apartment. Then she turned her eyes towards him again; and there was a smile in them, of an unstable kind; and tears were gathering in the lashes. “Well,” she said, “it will be something for me to think of. It will be something for me to be proud of. There can be no harm in that. I shall be able to say to myself ‘Vincent thought so well of you that he once asked you to be his wife’——”

“But I don’t know what you mean, Maisrie!” he exclaimed, and in spite of her he seized her hand and held it tight between his two. “What do you mean? You are going to be my wife! Oh, I don’t want you to make rash promises; I don’t want to frighten you; no, I want you to be of good heart, and you will see things will turn out all right in the end. And if you don’t know your own mind yet—if you are afraid to say anything—won’t you let me guess? Surely we

have not been all this time together, and seeing so much of each other, without getting to know each other pretty intimately? And if I did make a mistake last night—well, that is a trifling matter—and I was too presumptuous——”

She managed to release her hand.

“Sit down, Vincent, and let me talk to you,” she said. “Perhaps I may not have another chance; and I do not wish you ever to look back and say I was ungrateful, or unreasonable, or cold-hearted. Cold-hearted?—not that—not that—towards you!” And then she went on in rather a sad way, “I think the time has about come that we should part. It has been a pleasant companionship: I am not likely ever to forget it. But your future is so important, and ours so uncertain, that I am sure the sooner we go separate ways the better. And I am anxious to make a change now. I think if my grandfather and I went away somewhere where we could live more cheaply—where there would be fewer temptations towards the spending of money—I could do something to support him, and leave him the luxury of his books. I am a woman now—I want to work——”

“You work? Not while I can!” he said, hotly.

She went on without heeding him.

“That is why I have been glad to see him so eager about this book of ballads. If he could only get rid of all indebtedness, to friends and others, through this book, then we should start clear; and I should ask him not to fret any more about his literary schemes. He is an old man. He has done everything for me: why should I not do something for him now? And I have no pride. The story about those Scotch estates was always a kind of fairy tale to me; I never had any real belief in the possibility of their coming to us; I was never a fine lady even in imagination. So that it matters little to me what I turn my hand to; if what little education I have had is useless, I would take to something else; I would work about a farm-house as soon as anything—for I am a great deal stronger than you may imagine——”

“Oh, what are you talking about, Maisrie!” he said, with simulated anger. “If you think I am going to allow any such folly, you are mistaken. There are plenty of dairymaids in the world without you. And I have the right to say something—I claim the right: I am going to interfere, whether you like it or not. When you speak of your duty towards your grandfather, that I understand. He has been everything to you:

who would ask you to forsake him? But, as you say, he is an old man. If anything were to happen to him, think of your own position. You have hardly a friend in the world—a few acquaintances in Canada, perhaps—but what is that? You will want some one to protect you: give me that right! If I let you go from me now, how am I to find you again?—how am I to know what may happen? Maisrie, have courage!—be frank!—tell me that the little message of last night meant something more!”

The eloquence was not in the words, but in the vibrating tones of his voice; and there were tears in her eyes as she answered—

“Vincent, I cannot—I dare not! You don’t know how grandfather and I are situated: you are so generous, so open-minded, that—that you see everything in so favourable a light; but then other people might step in——”

“Between you and me? Who?” he demanded, with set lips.

“Ah,” she said, with a sigh, “who can tell? And besides—besides—do you not think I am as proud of you as any one?—do you not think I am looking forward to all that is expected of you?—and when I hear of you as this or that, I will say to myself ‘I knew what Vincent was going to do; and now he is glad that he did not hamper himself out of—out of pity—for a friendless girl’——”

But here she broke down altogether, and covered her face with her hands, and sobbed without possibility of concealment. He was by her side in a moment; he laid his hand on the down-bent head—on the soft hair.

“Maisrie,” he said, with the utmost gentleness, “don’t make me angry. If you have anything to say why you cannot, or will not, be my wife, tell me; but do not be unreasonable and foolish. You speak of my future: it is nothing to me without you. You talk of the expectations of my friends: I tell you that my life is my own. And why should you be any drag or hamper—you! I wish you would think of yourself a little: not of me. Surely there is something better in the world than ambition, and figuring before the public in newspapers.” Then he stopped for a second or two; and resumed in a lower and different tone. “Of course, if you refuse me your love, that is different. That I can understand. I have done nothing to deserve it: I have come to you as a beggar. If you refuse me that, there is nothing more to be said. I do not blame you. If I have made a mistake, so much the worse for me——”

She rose.

"Vincent," she said, between her half-stifled sobs, "you are not very kind. But it is better so—much better. Now I must go and help grandfather to find that book. And as this is to be the last word—well, then—dear friend—don't be so ungenerous to me when in after years you look back——"

But he was not likely to let her go like that. He interposed between her and the door; nay, he drew her towards him, and took her head between his hands, and pushed back the hair from her brow, as though he would read down to the very depths of those beautiful, tear-dimmed eyes.

"You have not refused me your love, Maisrie—because you dare not!" he said. "And what do I care whether you say it or not—when I know?" And therewith he kissed her on the mouth—and again—and again. "Now you are mine. You dare not deny your love—and I claim you as my wife——"

She struggled backward to be free from him, and said almost wildly—

"No, no—Vincent, you do not understand—I have not been frank with you—I cannot ever be your wife!—some day I will tell you——"

There was no chance for any further entreaty or explanation, for at this moment there was the sound of a footstep outside, the door was opened, and old George Bethune appeared, carrying in his hands some half-dozen books. When he saw those two standing opposite to each other, the young man pale and agitated, the girl also pale and with her eyes streaming over with tears, he glanced from the one to the other in silence. Then he walked deliberately forward to the table, and laid down the books. Maisrie escaped from the room. Vincent returned to the fireplace, too bewildered by her last words to care much what construction might be placed upon this scene by her grandfather. But he had to recall himself: for the old man, just as if he had observed nothing, just as if nothing had happened, but yet with a certain measured precision in his tones, resumed his discussion of "The Demon Lover," and proceeded to give his reasons for thinking that the story had migrated from the far north to the south.

But presently Mr. Bethune had turned from those books, and was staring into the fire, as he said with a certain slow and significant emphasis—

"It will be an interesting subject; and yet I must guard against being wholly absorbed by it. And that for my grand-

daughter's sake. I imagine we have been living a much too monotonous life for some time back; and that is not well for any one, especially for a young girl. A limitation of interests; that is not wholesome. The mind becomes morbid; and exaggerates trifles. And in the case of Maisrie, she has been used to change and travel; I should think the unvarying routine of our life of late, both as regards our employments and amusements, extremely prejudicial to her health and spirits——"

"Why, she seems very well!" Vincent said, anxiously—for he knew not what all this might mean.

"A change will do her good—will do all of us good, perhaps," said the old man. "Every one knows that it is not wise for people to see too much of each other; it puts too heavy a strain on friendship. Companionship should be a volunteered thing—should be a reward, indeed, for previous isolation and work——"

Vincent's forehead flushed; and the natural man within him was crying out 'Oh, very well, then; I don't press any further acquaintance on you!' But for Maisrie's sake he curbed his pride. He said, as quickly as might be—

"In our case I thought that was precisely how our companionship stood—a little relaxation after the labours of the day. However, if you think there has been too much of that——"

"I was speaking of general principles," Mr. Bethune said, with equanimity. "At the same time I confess that, as regards Maisrie, I think that some alteration in our mode of existence might be beneficial. Her life of late has been much too monotonous."

"Again and again she has told me that she delights in the quietude of it!" the young man protested—for it suddenly occurred to him that Maisrie was to be dragged away from England altogether. "Surely she has had enough of travel?"

"Travel? That is not what I have in mind," old George Bethune said. "We have neither the time nor the means. I should merely propose to pack up a few books and things, and take Maisrie down to some sea-side place—Brighton, perhaps, as being the most convenient."

The young man's face flashed instant relief; Brighton—that was something different from what he had been dreading. Brighton—Brighton was not Toronto nor Montreal; there was going to be no wide Atlantic between him and her; a trivial matter of an hour's railway journey or something of the kind!

"Oh, Brighton?" said he, quite gladly. "Yes, that will be very pleasant for her. Brighton is brisk and lively enough at this time of the year; and if there is any sunlight going, you are sure to get it there. I am afraid you will find the hotels full——"

"We shall not trouble the hotels," Mr. Bethune said, with grave dignity. "Some very humble lodgings will suffice. And perhaps we might get rooms in a house on the hill at the back of the town; that would give me seclusion and quiet for my work. Yes, I think the change will be wholesome; and the sooner we set about it the better."

Well, to Vincent it did not seem that this proposal involved any great alteration in their mode of life, except that he himself was obviously and unmistakeably excluded; nevertheless, he was so glad to find that the separation from Maisrie was of a mild and temporary nature that he affected to give a quite cordial approval. He even offered to engage the services of his aunt, Mrs. Ellison, in securing them apartments; but Mr. Bethune answered that Maisrie and he were old travellers, and would be able to shift for themselves. And when did they propose to go? Well, to-morrow, if his granddaughter were content.

While they were yet talking, Maisrie made her appearance. She had bathed her eyes in water, and there was not much trace of her recent agitation, though she was still somewhat pale. And Vincent—to show her that he refused to be alarmed by her parting words—to show her that he was quite confident as to the future—preserved his placid, not to say gay, demeanour.

"Do you know what your grandfather is going to do with you, Maisrie?" said he. "He is going to take you down to Brighton for a time. Yes, and at once—to-morrow, if you care to go."

She glanced quickly from one to the other, as if fearing some conspiracy between them.

"And you, Vincent?" she asked turning to him.

He did not meet her look.

"I? Oh, I must keep to work; I can't afford to go away down and idle among those fashionable folk. My Mendover lecture isn't half sketched out yet. And then, again, you remember the article I told you about?—before beginning it I ought really to run down to Scotland, or at least to Yorkshire, and see one of those Municipal Lodging-houses in actual opera-

tion. They seem to me marvellous institutions," continued this consummate hypocrite (as if the chief thought in his mind at this moment was the housing of the industrious poor!), "and of the greatest importance to the country at large; worked at a profit, too, that is the amazing thing! Fancy at Huddersfield; threepence a day includes use of cooking and table utensils, a smoking-room, reading-room, and conversation-room, and then a bed at night—all for threepence! Belonging to the ratepayers, themselves—under the management of the Corporation—and paying a profit so that you can go on improving and extending. Why every big town in the kingdom ought to have a Municipal Lodging-house, or half a dozen of them; and it only needs to be shown how they are worked for the example to be copied everywhere——"

"And when do you go, Vincent?" she asked with downcast eyes.

"Oh, I am not sure yet," he made answer cheerfully. "Of course, I ought in duty to go; but it will cost me half what I shall get for the article. However, that is neither here nor there. But if this is to be our last night together for a little while, Maisrie," he went on, to keep up his complacent acquiescence in this temporary separation, "you might give us a little music—won't you?—you haven't had the violin out of its case for a long time."

She was very obedient. She went and got the violin—though she was in no playing or singing mood.

"What, then, grandfather?" she said when she was ready.

"Whatever you please."

Then she began, and very slowly and tenderly she played the air of a Scotch song—"Annie's Tryst." It is a simple air, and yet pathetic in its way; and indeed so sensitive and skilful was her touch that the violin seemed to speak; any one familiar with the song might have imagined he could hear the words interpenetrating those vibrant notes—

"Your hand is cauld as snaw, Annie,
Your cheek is wan and white;
What gars ye tremble sae, Annie,
What maks your e'e sae bright?
The snaw is on the ground, Willie,
The frost is cauld and keen,
But there's a burnin' fire, Willie,
That scars my heart within.

.

Oh, will ye tryst wi' me, Annie,
 Oh, will ye tryst me then?
 I'll meet ye by the burn, Annie,
 That wimples down the glen.
 I daurna tryst wi' you, Willie,
 I daurna tryst ye here,
 But we'll hold our tryst in heaven, Willie,
 In the springtime o' the year."

"That is too sad, Maisrie," her grandfather said fretfully.
 "Why don't you sing something?"

She turned to Vincent: there was a mute question in her eyes.

"Will you sing the *Claire Fontaine*, Maisrie?" said he.

She seemed a little surprised: it was a strange song to ask for on a night of farewell; but she did as she was bidden. She went and got the book and placed it open before her on the table: then she drew her bow across the strings.

But hardly had she began to sing the little ballad than it became evident that there was something added to the pure, clear tones of her voice—some quality of an indefinable nature—some alien influence that might at any moment prove too strong for her self-control.

Sur la plus haute branche—

this was the point at which she began—

*Le rossignol chantait ;
 Chante, rossignol, chante,
 Toi qui as le cœur gai—*

And so far all was well; but at the refrain

*Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
 Jamais je ne t'oublierai*

her voice shook a little, and her lips were tremulous. Vincent cursed his folly a hundred times over: why had he asked her to sing the *Claire Fontaine*? But still she held bravely on:

*Chante, rossignol, chante,
 Toi qui as le cœur gai ;
 Tu as le cœur à rire,
 Moi je l' ai-t-à pleurer—*

And here she could go no further for those choking tears in her voice; she stood for a moment all uncertain, trying to master

herself; then she laid the violin on the table and with a broken, "Good-night, Vincent—and good-bye;" she turned and left the room, her hands hiding her face, her frame shaken by the violence of her sobbing.

There was an instant of silence.

"Yes, it is time she was taken away," old George Bethune said, with a deep frown on his shaggy eyebrows. "Her nerves are all wrong. Why should she make such a to-do about leaving London for a fortnight?"

But Vincent Harris knew better than that. It was not this unexpected departure that was in Maisrie's mind: it was the words that he had spoken to her, and she to him, earlier in the evening. It was of no fortnight's absence she was thinking, but of a far wider and longer farewell.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GNAWING FOX.

BUT he was not disheartened by those ominous words of hers, not even on the following morning, when he found the little thoroughfare so strangely silent and empty, and the two windows over the way become vacant and devoid of charm. He had the high courage and impetuous will of youth; seeing no difficulties or dangers ahead, he refused to believe in any; Maisrie had not denied him her love, therefore she must be his wife; and all the future shone fair. And so he set to work on his Mendover lecture; and made good progress, even if his thoughts went sometimes flying away down to Brighton. As for the lecture itself—well, perhaps certain of its contentions and illustrations would have surprised and even shocked that Communist-capitalist, his father; but the young man was accustomed to think for himself.

Yes, this little street was terribly empty, and those windows indescribably blank. And the room was lonely, work or no work. But as he was standing looking out, cigarette in hand, after his frugal luncheon, a happy inspiration sprung into his head; for here was Hobson, the husband of the landlady across

the way, coming along the pavement; and would it not be a comforting thing to have him in to talk about the two lodgers who had just left? Vincent opened the window a bit, and said into the street (there was no need to call)—

“Hobson!”

The man looked up.

“Yes, sir?”

“I want you for a moment.”

Then Vincent went himself downstairs and opened the door; and here was the shabby-genteel ex-butler, obsequiously waiting, with an excess of imbecile amiability in his weak, prominent, nervous eyes.

“Come in and have a smoke, Hobson,” the young man said. “You must be lonely over there now. Makes a difference doesn’t it?”

“Wonderful, sir, wonderful;” and the docile Hobson obediently followed up the stairs, and accepted a big cigar, and was prevailed on to draw in a chair to the fire. Vincent took a seat opposite him, and lit another cigarette—in a quite friendly fashion.

“You’ve seen a good deal of Mr. Bethune since he came to live in your house?” the young man began, in a sort of tentative and encouraging way. And Hobson responded with instant enthusiasm —

“Ah, yes, indeed, sir, and proud of the same. A great man, sir—oh, a very great man—and how he came to be where he is, sir, well, that beats me, sir. And that haffable, sir!—if he ave somethink on the table, he’ll say, ‘Hobson, bring two tumblers’—yes, sir—‘Hobson, bring two tumblers’—and I must take a seat, just as kind and condescending as you are, sir. ‘Fill your glass, Hobson,’ he says, just that haffable like——”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” said Vincent, looking guiltily towards his vacant sideboard. “The fact is, I haven’t anything of the kind in these rooms; but I can send out. Which would you like, gin or whiskey?”

“Whichever you please,” said Hobson, complacently, “being so kind as to think of it, sir.”

The necessary fluid was soon procured; and Hobson was liberally helped. And when at length he began to expatiate on the character and the wonderful attainments and abilities of Maisrie’s grandfather, there may have been a little exaggeration (for gin tends towards exaggeration) in his speech; but his aim and admiration were genuine enough at the core. He

grovelled in the dust before that impressive old man. He spoke in almost a breathless way of his haffability. Why, that a great personage in literature should condescend to read his, Hobson's, poor little verses was extraordinary; but that he should give advice, too, and encouragement, that was overwhelming. And as for the young lady—but here Hobson's language failed him. With tears in his eyes he declared that she was a hangel of sweetness—which did not convey much to Vincent's eager-listening ears. But when he went on to tell about all sorts of little acts of kindness and consideration—when he spoke of her patience with the old gentleman's temper, of her cheerfulness over small disappointments happening to herself, of her gentleness, and sunniness, and invariable good humour—here he was on more intelligible ground; and his delighted and grateful audience was not slow to press on him another cigar, which was not refused. Indeed, what with so much courtesy shown him, and what with the stimulating influence of the gin and water, Hobson grew valiant; and began to broach wild and iconoclastic theories about filthy lucre, and to describe in dark colours the character of any one—presumably his own wife—who could be so base as to take every farthing of her rent fortnight after fortnight, from a grand and noble old gentleman and a beautiful young lady both of whom seemed to have known better days.

“Do you know how long they are to be away?” Vincent asked.

“Well, sir, the old gentleman, sir, he says perhaps two weeks and perhaps three.”

“I see you've put up a notice that the rooms are to be let.”

“Yes, sir; but that ain't much use, not for so short a time, sir.”

And here another sudden fancy struck the young man.

“But I know how you can get them let,” said he.

“How, sir?”

“You can let them to me.”

“Law, sir!”

There was a doubtful look about Hobson's big, vacuous eyes: being of a poetic and sensitive nature he did not like jokes, and was suspicious. However, the young gentleman, to judge by his manner, seemed fair and honest and above-board.

“I will take them,” said Vincent, “until Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter come back. Not to occupy them myself, you understand; but I don't want any stranger to be going into these rooms, you see—that is all.”

"How kind, sir—how thoughtful!" Hobson said, in a pathetic way. "That it is to have good, kind friends!"

"And as the rooms are now mine, I suppose I might go over and look at them—if you will finish up your tumbler?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," Hobson said, jumping to his feet with alacrity, and hastily draining his glass. "They're all tidied up, sir, against the chance of a lodger. And won't the missus be surprised!—for the women, sir, the women, you see, sir, they likes to haggle and bargain, but with men, sir, begging your pardon, sir, it's a word and done!"

Indeed he seemed quite proud of the promptitude with which he had conducted and concluded this negotiation; and it was with an unusual air of authority and importance that he led the way upstairs and showed Vincent into the little parlour, with which he was already abundantly familiar. There were few alterations. The old man's books, Maisrie's music, and similar personal belongings, had disappeared; a hideous purple vase stood for ornament in the middle of the table. The pallid lithographs were still on the walls; Maisrie's chrysanthemums were out there in the little iron balcony.

"Would you like to see the rooms upstairs, sir?"

The young man hesitated for a second.

"Oh, very well."

Hobson led the way up to the next landing; and there the first door he came to he flung wide open.

"The young lady's room, sir."

But Vincent did not accept the implied invitation. He hung shamefacedly back.

"Oh, yes, that's all right," said he. "I—I only wished to—to have it kept for her."

And yet he lingered for another second at the door of this chamber—that seemed so sacred—that seemed to shut him out. He could see the dressing-table, the chest of drawers, the neatly folded bed, the rather dingy window.

"Look here, Hobson," said he, "if I were to get a few things to make the room a little more cheerful, I suppose that could be done without letting Miss Bethune know who sent them? The looking-glass there—you know, that is not the right kind of thing at all; there should be a pretty mirror on the dressing-table, with some lace round the top of it——"

Here he ventured in half a step or so, and rather timidly looked round.

"That one gas-jet can't be half enough, when Miss Bethune

is dressing to go out in the evening," he said, complainingly—perhaps to conceal his incomprehensible diffidence and shyness. "She must have candles—one on each side of the mirror, for example. And that screen across the window, why, it is so common!—it ought to be a piece of pale silk—to let the light through."

He ventured a few inches further, and again looked round.

"What do you call that thing?—the coverlet—the counterpane—isn't it? Well, it shouldn't be white, and cold, and cheerless like that: it should be a deep crimson satin—and there should be pretty things at the head of the bed—loops and bows of ribbon—my goodness, what is Mrs. Hobson about!—a young lady's room shouldn't be like a cell in a prison!"

"Law, sir, I'm very sorry," Hobson said, in a bewildered way: a crimson satin coverlet sounded a grand thing; but it also meant a heap of money.

"But come away out and I will talk to you," Vincent said, just as if they were in a mysteriously sacred shrine, where the discussion of business affairs was a sort of profanation. Or perhaps he resented the intrusion of the amiable but gin-odorous Hobson? At all events, he did not resume the conversation until they were both downstairs again in the parlour.

"You understand, then," he said, and there was no more timidity about his speech now, "I am willing to get a number of things for the room, and to make you and Mrs. Hobson a present of them, on the distinct condition that Miss Bethune is kept in absolute ignorance how they came there. One word to her—and out they come again, every rag and stick. Why, you can easily invent excuses! You can tell them you took the opportunity of their absence to brighten up the place a bit. It is in your own interest to keep the rooms smart: it doesn't imply any favour conferred on your lodgers. Don't you see?"

"Yes, sir. Very kind of you, sir, indeed," said Hobson, who seemed a little confused. "And what did you want me to do?"

"Do? I want you to do nothing: and I want you to say nothing. Don't you understand? I am going to send in a few things to smarten up that room; and they are yours so long as not any one of you hints to Miss Bethune where they came from. Isn't that simple enough?"

But far less simple was his own part in this transaction, as he was speedily to discover. For when he went outside again, and made away towards Regent-street, thinking he would go to

a famous shop there, and buy all sorts of pretty things, it gradually dawned on him that he had undertaken a task entirely beyond his knowledge. For example, he could purchase any quantity of crimson satin; but how and where was he going to get it made up into a coverlet, or counterpane, or quilt, or whatever the thing was called? Then supposing he had the mirror and the lace, who was going to put the lace round the top of the mirror?—he could not do that for himself. A little set of ornamental book-shelves he could buy, certainly; but how was he going to ask for the bows of ribbon, or the silk drapery, or whatever it was that ought to adorn the brass rods at the head of the bed? The more he considered the matter the more clearly he saw that he must consult a woman, and the only woman he could consult in confidence was his aunt, Mrs. Ellison, who had now returned to Brighton. And perhaps he strove to conceal from himself what it was that so easily and naturally drew his thoughts to Brighton; perhaps he was hardly himself aware how this secret hunger of the soul was minute by minute and hour by hour increasing in its demands. Maisrie had not been so long away; but already he felt that one brief glimpse of her, no matter at what distance, would be a priceless thing. And then again it would not be breaking any compact. He would not seek to go near her, if there was this understanding that these two were for the present separated the one from the other. She would not even know he was in the town. And surely it would be a new and wonderful experience to look at Maisrie from afar off, as if she were a stranger.

So instead of going to Regent-street, he went to the nearest post-office and telegraphed to Mrs. Ellison, asking if she could take him in for a day or two. Then he walked on home; and by the time he had reached Grosvenor Place, the answer was there waiting him; he was to go down at once. He put a few things in his bag; jumped into a hansom and drove to Victoria-station; caught the four-thirty train; and eventually arrived at Brunswick Terrace about six. He guessed that his aunt's afternoon visitors would be gone; and he would have ample opportunity of a long talk with her before her dinner.

His anticipations proved correct. When he was shown into the big drawing-room—which looked very snug and warm amid its magnificence—he found the tall and bright-eyed young widow in sole possession; and she came forward to welcome him with great complaisance.

"Very sensible of you, Vin. You know I can always make room for you, no matter who is in the house."

"If I had gone to a hotel, aunt, you would have made an awful row; and I don't want to quarrel with you just at present: the fact is, I have come to you for advice and help," said he. "But first—my congratulations! I was hardly surprised when I got your letter; and I am sure no one can wish you more happiness than I do——"

"Oh, be quiet," she said; and she took a seat at a little distance from the fire, by the side of a small table, and put a fan between her eyes and the crimson-shaded lamp. "Congratulations? Well, I suppose there are no fools like old fools. But if grown-up people will play at being children, and amuse themselves by writing things in the sand—did I tell you how it all happened?—they must take the consequences. And I, who used to be so content! Haven't I often told you? Perhaps I boasted too much——"

"Oh, yes, pretend you regret it!" said he. "And you talk of your being so old—you!—why, what girl of all your acquaintance has half your life and spirit, or half your good looks, either——"

"Vincent Harris," said she, and she turned round and faced him, "what do you want?"

He laughed.

"It is a very simple matter, aunt."

And then he began to tell her of the little predicament in which he was placed; and to beseech her help. Would she come and choose the things for him? There were plenty of bric-à-brac shops in Brighton: she would know what was most appropriate: her own house was evidence of her taste. But his ingenuous flattery was of no avail. Mrs. Ellison's face grew more and more serious, until at length she exclaimed—

"Why, Vin, this is the very madness of infatuation! And I had been hoping for far other things. I had imagined from the tone of your last letter that perhaps there might be a change—that your eyes had been opened at last. So this is going on just the same as ever?"

"It is going on, as you call it, aunt; and is likely to go on—so long as I live."

"Then I, for one, wish to have nothing to do with it," she said, sharply. "And this last proposal is really too audacious. What business have you with that girl's room?—what right have you to go into it?"

He was rather taken aback—for a moment.

"Business?—oh, none of course. None whatever—that is to say—oh, yes, I have, though!—I have a perfect right to go into it. The room is not hers. It is mine. I have paid for it. When she comes back it will be hers; and where is the harm of her finding it a little prettier?—that is all."

"I must say, Vin," she continued, in a very reserved fashion, "that the infatuation of a young man may excuse a good deal; but this is a little—a little too much. Do you consider it quite nice—quite becoming? A satin counterpane! I wonder what the girl would think herself—if she has any refinement of feeling—if she has any delicacy——"

His face grew very pale.

"'If she has any refinement of feeling—if she has any delicacy,'" he repeated.

Then he rose.

"It is useless to say anything further, aunt; there is an end this time."

But she had risen too. He tried to pass her—and failed; nay, she went to the door, and stood with her back against it, and faced him.

"No, you shall not go," she said. "Why should there be any dissension? You are my own dear boy; I would do anything for you—except in this one direction——"

"Except in this one direction!" he repeated, scornfully.

"Why cannot we remain friends," she said, with appealing eyes, "good and true friends—and agree to leave this one subject alone?"

"This one subject—that is my life!" he said, vehemently. "What folly you talk! You wish to cut away the very thing I live for; the very thing that is my life; and to continue your friendship with what remains—a senseless stick or stone! And why? Because of your insensate prejudice, your cruel and baseless suspicions. Why do you talk to me as if I were a boy? I have seen twice as much of the world as you have; I have had better opportunities of learning how to judge strangers. But you—you live in a narrow groove—you have your maid to talk to—your acquaintances to call in the afternoon—your friends to dinner—and what besides? That is your world. What do you know of the human beings outside it? Must they all be dishonest—because they have not been heard of by your handful of a set? Must they all be thieves and swindlers—because they are not in the Court Directory? But it is little

matter. If this subject is debarred, then all is debarred, as between you and me. You can go your own way, and I mine. I did expect, now that you have your own happiness secured, you might show some little generosity, some little sympathy; but I see it is different; and I will not allow one who is dearer to me than all the world to be treated with such enmity, while I am supposed to stand by and accept it as a natural condition of affairs. I do not; I have had enough; and so here is an end, as between you and me; and I hope you will have more happiness than you seem to wish for other people."

Well, Mrs. Ellison was not used to giving way; but she was very fond of this proud and handsome boy; and she gave just one sob, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"You are not very kind, Vin," she said.

And what marvellous thing was this that instantaneously smote his heart? Why, Maisrie had made use of this very expression on the preceding afternoon! And all of a sudden he seemed to recognise that his adversary here was a woman; she was akin to his beloved—and therefore to be treated gently; Maisrie's voice and eyes seemed to be pleading for her: surely that was enough? He hesitated for a moment: then he said—

"Very well; let it be as you wish. We shall see how we get on, with the one thing that is of more importance to me than anything else shut out from mention. But I must say this to you, aunt: I do not see I am doing anything that the most fastidious person can object to if I put a few pretty things into the room of the girl who is to be my wife."

"How do you know that she is to be your wife, Vin?" she said, rather sadly.

"I know," he made answer.

"My poor boy!" she said; and then she took him by the hand and led him back to the little table at which they had been sitting; and there they had some further conversation about more or less indifferent things, with the one all-important subject carefully avoided. And then it was time for them to go away and dress for dinner.

Lord Musselburgh dined with them that evening, and remained some time after the other guests had gone. To Vincent it seemed a puzzling thing that two betrothed people should make so merry. They appeared so well content with their present estate; they were so assured as to the future; no anxieties; no conflicting hopes and fears; they were in the happiest mood. Next morning, too, Lord Musselburgh again

made his appearance; and the three of them went out for a stroll along the promenade. All the world was shining fair and clear; Mrs. Ellison was looking her best, and seemed to know it; her fiancé was in a gay humour. Why, they were almost like the 'lover and his lass' of whom Thomas Morley sang nigh three hundred years ago—those 'pretty country folks' who lived in a perpetual spring-time, with birds singing hey-ding-a-ding-a-ding to them through all the jocund hours. The tall and elegant young widow blushed and laughed like a maid; her eyes were sarcastic, playful, amused, according to her varying mood; the sunlight touched her pretty brown hair. There was, indeed, a sort of audacity of comeliness about her, that set Vincent thinking of a very different kind of beauty—the beauty that seems to be dowered with a divine and angelic sadness. He was walking with these two; but he did not take part in their frolic talk; nor did he pay much attention to the crowd of people, the butterflies of fashion, who had come out into the pleasant sunshine. He seemed to see before him a face that, with all its youth, and its touch of colour, and its grace of outline, was strangely pensive and wistful. And again he asked himself, as many a time he had asked himself, what that expression meant: whether it had been brought there by experience of the many vicissitudes of life, or by loneliness, or whether it was not something more tragic still—the shadow of an impending fate. There was more than that he could not understand: her curious resignation, her hopelessness as to the future, her wish to get away. And what was it she had concealed from him? And why had she declared she could not ever be his wife?

"You are very silent, Vin," his fair neighbour said, turning her merry eyes towards him at last. "Here is Lord Musselburgh declaring that if he were a Jew he would turn dentist, to have it out with the Christians for what they did in the Middle Ages. A horrid revenge, wouldn't it be?—and so mean—under pretence of affording relief. Oh, look at that girl over there—I do believe the ruff is coming back—we shall all be Elizabethans by-and-by."

But what business had women ever with ruffs?" Lord Musselburgh interposed. "Why, when the dandies and bucks of Henry VIII.'s time began to make themselves splendid by puffing themselves out round the neck, of course it was in imitation of the stag—as the stag becomes when he is supposed to captivate the fancy of the hinds; but you don't find the hinds with similar adornments. Such things are proper to males:

why should women try to look magnificent round the back of the neck? Why should a hen covet a cockscomb? It's all wrong—it's against natural laws."

"Natural laws in a milliner's shop!" she said. "Oh, do look at those two Italian girls; what English peasant-girl could choose colour like that? I *should* like to speak to them—for a moment."

Lord Musselburgh did not seem inclined to interfere.

"I dare say they may have been long enough in England," said he, "to have picked up a little of the Italian that English ladies speak. You may try them."

But she refrained; for at this moment one of the girls began to play a few bars of *Funiculi-funiculà* evidently as an introduction to the singing of her companion; whereupon Lord Musselburgh proposed that Mrs. Ellison should cross over to look at the windows of one or two jewellers' shops—in which both of them happened to be much interested just at this time.

The morning went by, and Vincent had caught no glimpse of Maisrie Bethune or her grandfather; but indeed he had not expected that; the old man would be busy with his books, and it was not likely that Maisrie would come wandering by herself through this fashionable throng. When at last the three friends got back to Brunswick Terrace, it was close on luncheon-time; though here Mrs. Ellison was much surprised to learn that Lord Musselburgh had engaged Vincent to lunch with him at the Bedford Hotel.

"What's the matter?" said she. "Business or billiards?"

"Neither," her fiancé made answer, "I only wanted to give you a little holiday, for an hour or two."

"Not longer then," she said. "For I am going out driving at three, and I shall expect you both."

Soon the two young men were seated at a little window-table in the spacious and cheerful coffee-room; and again Vincent was struck by the eminently practical manner in which his companion spoke of his forthcoming marriage. It was going to be, he frankly intimated, a very useful arrangement for both Mrs. Ellison and himself; and their combined fortunes would enable them to do what hitherto had been impossible for either of them. Mrs. Ellison was fond of society; he had always looked forward to the formation of a political salon when once he got married; and now he thought he could afford to have a much bigger house, which would be necessary for that purpose, than his present one in Piccadilly. Then

there were speculations as to whether he, Musselburgh, ought to accept office—some subsidiary office, of course, as befitting his years—when his party came into power again: you see, Vin Harris was being consulted now as if he were a friend of the family. But as for Vincent's own affairs—not a word: Lord Musselburgh had received a hint; and he was discretion itself.

And yet if ever in his life the younger of those two friends had need of a confidant, it was that afternoon; for something then happened that seemed to strike at the very roots of his being. When it was about time for them to go along to keep their appointment with Mrs. Ellison, Vincent was standing in the hall of the hotel, waiting for Lord Musselburgh, who had momentarily gone upstairs; and he was idly looking out upon the passing crowd. Idly and absently; there was no one there to interest him; very different it would be (he was saying to himself) towards six or seven o'clock, when perhaps Maisrie and her grandfather would come out for a stroll before going to dine at one of the restaurants. At present he had no sort of concern with all those people who went driving and walking past, in the dull wintry sunshine. It was a pretty show; and that was all.

But of a sudden his heart stood still; and his startled vision beheld what seemed incredible, and yet was there, and actual, and beyond any doubt. Ere he was aware, a vehicle had driven by—a tall dog-cart, with two figures in front and one behind; but another glance revealed to him that the one behind was old George Bethune: who could mistake at any distance the powerful and striking head, the shaggy eyebrows, the flowing white hair? And the two in front?—one was a young man, to Vincent unknown: the other—a terrible misgiving told him that was Maisrie, though they were now some way off. What did it all mean? He had never heard of their knowing anyone in Brighton. They had come down for seclusion, for work; yet here they were in the midst of the fashionable crowd; and a young man—a stranger—was making ostentatious display of his acquaintance with them. A thousand wild surmises, the offspring of a very madness of jealousy, sprang into his brain. Why had the old man so clearly intimated to him that he was not wanted—that they wished to go to Brighton by themselves? And who was this person who was making such open parade of his intimacy with them? Alas! there was no answer to these burning and bewildering questions; and he stood there

breathless, alarmed, yet not daring to ask the cause of his alarm.

Lord Musselburgh came along the hall.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Vin——"

"Oh, don't mind that," the young man said, striving to conceal his agitation. "The fact is—I—I don't think I will go driving this afternoon: will you make my excuses to my aunt——?"

"What's the matter?" said Musselburgh, regarding him. "You look as if you had seen a ghost or a creditor: what is it, man?"

"Never mind—never mind—it is nothing," Vin said, hastily. "I will see you later on. Will you make my excuses—thanks!"

The hall porter swung the door open; and before his astonished companion could remonstrate, he had passed out and down the stone steps. He crossed over, to lose himself in the throng on the opposite promenade. The dog-cart would be coming by again: he would see who this new friend was. Could he not hide somewhere?—he felt like a spy, like a traitor, with all those dire imaginings surging through his brain. And sudden wrath, too: he would demand to know by what right any stranger was allowed to make Maisrie Bethune so conspicuous. Why, it was too public!—it was a boast; and hardly decent, either; ought not respect for age and white hair to have placed the old man in front, instead of inviting all the world to witness the flattering of a young girl? And as for Maisrie—well, even in his wildest and blackest surmises he could think no serious harm of Maisrie; but she was too yielding; she was too generous with her favours; she ought to make distinctions; she ought not to permit this great, idle crowd to draw false conclusions. It was ill done of her—behind his back: had she so soon forgotten that he had pledged his life to her not so very many hours ago?

By-and-bye he knew rather than saw that they were returning. He was on the seaward side of the road; there were a good many people passing to and fro; moreover, he was partly concealed by an open fly that stood close to the railings. The tall dog-cart came swiftly along: an unprejudiced spectator would have said that the young man who was driving was rather a good-looking young fellow, of the pink and white type, with a small yellow moustache carefully waxed at the ends, and clear grey eyes. He wore a buff-coloured coat, with a velvet

collar of similar hue ; he had a flower in his button-hole. Then, again, his turn-out was faultless—a neatly-appointed cart—a beautiful, high-stepping roan. All this was visible at a glance.

But it was on Maisrie Bethune that Vincent's gaze was bent ; and as she drew near, his heart was smitten at once with remorse and with gratitude. Had he expected, then, that she would be smirking and smiling and coquetting with this new acquaintance ? On the contrary, Maisrie sate there grave and silent and reserved ; her eyes were neither observant nor conscious ; once or twice they were turned towards the sea. To Vincent she seemed so distinguished-looking, so refined, and noble, and self-possessed, as contrasted with that fresh-complexioned country clown who had the monstrous audacity to claim her as his companion ! Then, as the dog-cart went by, he caught sight of George Bethune. He was sitting rather side-ways, to permit of his addressing an occasional remark to the young gentleman who was driving : no doubt that was why Maisrie was allowed to remain silent. Perhaps she was thinking—of someone whom she thought to be far away—?

Strangely enough, as soon as they had disappeared from view, his doubts and imaginings grew black again. For a moment, that vision of Maisrie's sweet face had charmed him out of himself ; but now these hideous questions rushed back upon him, demanding an answer where there was no answer. He did not attempt to reason himself out of this paroxysm of jealousy ; that would have been useless ; he could but submit to this gnawing torture of anxiety and suspense, while walking up and down, and waiting, and fearing to find them coming within sight once more.

They did not return. Shortly after four the dusk began to fall ; by half-past five black night had enveloped sky and sea, and the town was all ablaze with golden stars. There were hardly any carriages now ; the people had betaken themselves to the other side of the road, to look in at the glaring shop-windows on their way home. Vincent found himself more alone than ever ; and knew not what to do or which way to turn. In his present frame of mind he dared not go near the house in Brunswick Terrace ; he could not submit to cross-examining eyes. It would drive him mad to talk, while those rankling conjectures were busy at his heart. He wanted to see Maisrie again ; and yet dreaded to see her, lest he should find her once more in the society of that man.

But about half-past six his aimless perambulation of the

streets became circumscribed. He drew nearer to the neighbourhood of the restaurants. If old George Bethune had brought his London habits down with him, as many people did, would not he soon make his appearance, along with his granddaughter? Here in East-street, for example, were *cafés*, both French and Italian, where they could have a foreign dinner if they chose. Would he venture to address them? Would he confess he had seen them driving—in the hope they might volunteer information for which he dared not ask? He could not tell; his brain was in a bewilderment of anxiety and unreasoning misery; and this grew worse, indeed, as the slow minutes went by, and there was no sign of the two figures for whom he was so eagerly watching.

And then a sickening thought occurred to him. What if those two had been invited to dine at a hotel by the country clod—by the young man from the plough—by the rustic dandy with the velvet collar? At the Old Ship, most likely—a private room—a profusion of flowers—plenty of champagne—Hodge Junior gay and festive—cigarettes between the courses—Arry having learnt so much from the cheap society journals; and will not Miss Bethune be persuaded to join? Ah, well, perhaps after dinner, when the liqueurs come to be handed round? There is a piano in the room: will Miss Bethune oblige with an accompaniment?—here is a smart little thing—“Kiss me on the sly, Johnnie!”—the latest draw at the music halls. . . .

Seven by the big clock over the stationer's shop; and still no sign of them. Clearly they were not coming to any restaurant hereabouts. So at length he left East Street, and went down to the King's-road, and wandered slowly along, glancing furtively into this or that hotel—especially where some coffee-room window happened to have been left with the blind up. It was a vain quest, and he was aware of it; but something, he knew not what, drew him on. And meanwhile his mind was busy with pictures—of a private room, and flowers, and three figures seated at table. *Ach weh! mein Liebchen war die Braut!*

At a quarter to eight, Lord Musselburgh was shown into Mrs. Ellison's drawing-room.

“Haven't you seen anything of Vin?” she said, with astonished eyes.

“No—nor you?”

“Nothing at all—and now he won't have time to dress for dinner.”

“I shouldn't wonder if he did not turn up for dinner,”

Musselburgh said. "Something very peculiar happened to him to-day—I could not precisely gather what—but he was obviously upset."

"Yes," said Mrs. Ellison, and her face was graver than its wont. "Something has indeed happened to him to-day—though he himself is not aware of it as yet."

She went to a little cabinet, and took from it two letters.

"I thought you ought to see both of these," said she. "One is from my brother-in-law; I got it just a minute or two after you left. The other is my answer; I will have it posted as soon as you have read it."

He took the first letter, which was from Vincent's father, and read it carefully through, without a word of comment. Then he took the other, which ran as follows:—

"DEAR HARLAND,

"It is very terrible; but I half suspected as much; and terrible as it is there is nothing to be done but to tell Vin the whole truth, and at once. Telegraph for him to-morrow morning—on business of importance; if he wants to come down again, I shall be ready with such consolation as I can think of. I fancy from one or two things that those people are here in Brighton just now: all the more reason why you should summon him home at once. Poor boy, it will be a sad awakening. But he is young; he will get over it; and perhaps be none the worse in the end for this cruel experience of the deceit and wickedness of the world. Let me know how he takes it.

"Yours affectionately,

"MADGE."

No, Vincent did not come in to dinner that evening. He was still walking up and down the King's-road, glancing now and again, but with a sort of hopelessness, at any little group of people that might appear at the hall-door of this or that hotel; and all the while there was a fire eating at his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

To say that Vin Harris's jealousy was unreasoning, ungovernable, and the cause of cruel and incessant torture to himself, is merely to say that it was jealousy; but by an unhappy coincidence this was the very moment chosen by his father to make a disclosure which, for a startled second or so, seemed to recall and confirm the young man's wildest suspicions. When Vincent, in obedience to the telegraphic summons, arrived at the house in Grosvenor Place, he found his father in the library, standing with his back to the fire. On this occasion the great capital-denouncing capitalist did not wear the suit of hodden grey which, at dinner in his own house, was designed to show his contempt for conventionality; no, when this interview was over, he meant to lunch at the Athenæum Club, and with a view to that solemn rite he had donned a black frock-coat which was tightly buttoned over his substantial form. A stiff upstanding collar and a satin tie added to the rigidity of his appearance; while his manner was, as usual, pompous and cold. With a roll of paper in his hand, he would have looked as if he were going to deliver an afternoon lecture at some public institution.

"I have sent for you, Vin," he began, "because I have something of importance to say to you, and the sooner it is said the better. You are aware that I have never sought to interfere with your way of life. Indeed I have seen no cause to do so. Your line of study I approve; your ambitions I would encourage; and as for the amusements and pleasures natural to your years, I can trust you to remember your own self-respect. But in one direction I confess I am disappointed. My chief aim in your education has been that you should see and know the world; that you should understand men; and by contact learn to cope with them, and hold your own. Yes, I confess I am disappointed; for if I am not misinformed—and I have taken the greatest trouble not to be misinformed—here are you, after all your travel and experience of the world, become the dupe of two common begging-letter impostors."

The young man looked up quickly; but he held his peace. Now this somewhat disconcerted Harland Harris, for he had

expected an instant and indignant protest, which would have justified a little judicious warmth on his side in production of proofs. But Vincent sate calm and collected, listening with apparent respect.

"Yes, deeply disappointed," his father continued, with a little more animation, "for this old charlatan who seems to have got hold of you is altogether too bare-faced and preposterous. Did you ever ask yourself how he lived; what was his business or profession; where he got the money to go from one country to another? Well, if you have not, I have; I have made enquiries; I have had him traced; I can tell you his story, and a very pretty story it is. Would you like to hear it?"

"I don't know that it concerns me much," said Vincent, with composure.

"Oh, it does not?" said the gentleman with the pompous professional air, upon whom this indifference seemed to have a somewhat irritating effect. "Well, there's nothing very grand about it—except the magnificent and wholesale lying! And perhaps also the incredible simplicity of the people who allowed themselves to be imposed on. Why, in Canada he called himself Lord Bethune!—was there no second-hand copy of Burke anywhere about to show them there was no such peerage in existence? Lord Bethune haunting newspaper-offices, and borrowing money right and left, because of his Scotch name, and his bogus literary schemes! His sham estates—his sham lineage—his sham coat of arms: did nobody think of turning up a book? 'Stand Fast, Craig-Royston!' Craig-Royston!——"

He crossed the room and took down a volume from one of the shelves.

"There," he said, putting the book on the table, "there is Black's Guide to Scotland. Can you find out where Craig-Royston is? Turn up the index."

Mechanically and carelessly Vincent did as he was bid.

"No, I don't see it there," he said.

"I should think not! Nor Balloray either: can you find Balloray? An easy thing to claim estates that don't exist; and wear armorial bearings of your own invention! Cadzow—oh, yes, Cadzow you will find—Cadzow undoubtedly exists; but most people thought that Cadzow belonged to the Duke of Hamilton. Or does Lord Bethune claim to be Marquis of Douglas and Earl of Angus as well?"

He paused; so Vincent was bound to answer.

"I don't know that it concerns me much," the young man said, repeating his former phrase. "Even if all you say is true, what then? You sent me out to see the world, and take people as I found them. Well, I found a good many liars; and one more or less doesn't matter much, does it?"

But Harland Harris was no fool; he instantly divined wherein lay the secret of Vincent's real or assumed indifference.

"Ah, I understand," said he. "I understand. You don't care so much about *him*. You are willing to let *him* go. You think you can dissociate him from his granddaughter. He may be a swindler—but you fancy she manages to keep aloof——"

The young man grew somewhat pale.

"Take care," said he, and he held up his hand as if he would enjoin silence. "Words that are said cannot be unsaid."

His father regarded him for a second, and then he endeavoured to bring a little more friendliness and consideration into his manner.

"I have heard of this infatuation," he said. "And if you had been like other young men, Vin, I should have said nothing. I should have left you to find out for yourself. But, you see, you have the misfortune to imagine other people to be as straightforward and honourable as yourself; you do not suspect; and you are inclined to trust your own judgment. But even if this girl were all you think she is, what madness it would be for you to contemplate marrying her! Look at her position—and at yours: look at her upbringing and present surroundings—and at yours; think of what is expected of you? what chances you have; what an alliance with a great family might do for you in public life. What good ever comes of over-leaping social barriers—of Quixotism—of self-sacrifice for sentiment's sake? What does a marriage between two people in different spheres mean? what is the inevitable result?—it is not the one that is raised—it is the other that is dragged down."

"These are strange doctrines for a socialist and a communist," Vincent observed.

"They are the doctrines of common sense," his father retorted, sharply. "However, it is unnecessary to say anything further on that score. You will abandon all this nonsense when you understand who and what this girl is; and you will thank God you have had your eyes opened in time. And indeed, if all that I am told is true—if I guess aright—if I

piece the story properly together—I should say she was by far the more dangerous of the two accomplices——”

Vincent's lips curled: he did not put his disdain into words.

“A painful revelation?” his father continued, in more oracular fashion. “Oh, yes, no doubt. But occasionally the truth is bitter and wholesome at the same time. What you believe about the girl is one thing; what I know about her is another: indeed I can gather that it was only through her artifice that the old man's impostures were accepted, or tolerated, at all. What is he?—a farçeur—a poseur—who would at once have been sent to the right about but for the *ingénue* by his side, with her innocent eyes and her sad look. When the writer of the begging-letter calls, his story might be inquired into: but no!—for here is this interesting young lady—and the hardest heart declines to cross-examine while she is standing there. And of course she must go to the newspaper-offices, to beguile the editor with her silent distress, while her grandfather is wheedling him out of a loan; or she accompanies him to the wine-merchant, or the bookseller, or the tailor, so that nothing can be said about unpaid accounts while she is by; and of course there is a renewal of credit. A very simple and effective trick: even where the people know the old man to be a rogue, they are sorry for the girl; and they have a pleasing sense of virtue in allowing themselves to be further mulcted: they little suspect that she is by far the more accomplished swindler of the two——”

Here Vincent laughed, in open scorn; but the laugh was a forced one; and his eyes were lowering.

“I am glad you consider it a laughing matter,” said Mr. Harris—who found it less easy to combat this contemptuous unbelief than if he had been met with indignation and wrath. “Perhaps, after all, the story is no revelation? Perhaps your complaisance goes further than merely tolerating the old man's lies? Perhaps the glamour the girl has thrown over you would lead you to accept her just as she is, her hypocrisy, her craft, and all? Or perhaps you have planned out for yourself a still more brilliant future than any that had occurred to your friends? Perhaps you aim at being the old man's successor? It is an easy way of getting through life, having a woman like that by your side, to earn your living for you. The lover of Manon Lescaut——”

Vincent leapt to his feet, his eyes aflame.

"You go too far," he said, breathing hard. "You go too far. I have been trying to remember you are my father: don't make it too difficult. What do I care about this farrago of nonsense that some one has put into your head—this trash—this venomous guessing? It is nothing to me. It is idle air. I *know* otherwise. But when it comes to insult—well, it is all an insult; but something must be forgiven to ignorance: the people who have supplied you with this guess-work rubbish are probably as ignorant as yourself about those two. Only—no more insults, if you please! I am your son; but—but there are limits to what you ask me to hear in patience. You talk of my madness and infatuation; it is your madness, your infatuation! What can you say of your own knowledge of that old man and his granddaughter? Why, nothing. You have never spoken to them; never seen them. And yet, without an atom of inquiry, without an atom of proof, you go and accept all this tissue of guess-work—this rubbish—this trash—as if it were gospel; and you expect me to give it a patient hearing? It is too contemptible!"

"Yes, but unfortunately," said Mr. Harris, with great calmness—for now he felt he had the advantage on his side, "you are mistaken in supposing that I have made no inquiry, and have received no proof. The inquiry has been made for me with great skill and patience, during the past month; and the proofs seem to me sufficient. Proofs?—you yourself shall furnish one."

This was a kind of challenge; and the young man accepted it. His eyes were fixed on his adversary.

"What, then?"

"When you find," said his father, with deliberation, "two people wandering from town to town, without any visible means of subsistence, you naturally wonder how they manage to live. Very well. But now, if you discover they have a pretty knack of falling in with this or that rich young gentleman, and allowing him to pay for them on all occasions, isn't the mystery partly solved? I am informed that these two people and yourself have been in the habit for a considerable time back of dining together in the evening—indeed, I have the name of the restaurant. Now I wish to ask you this question point-blank: is it not the fact that in every case you have paid?"

Vincent did not answer; he was not thinking of himself at all; nor yet of the direct question that had been put to him.

A terrible wave of bewilderment had passed over him; his heart seemed to have within it but one sudden cry—"Maisrie—Maisrie—why were you driving—with that stranger?"—and all the world grew black with a horror of doubt and despair. He thought of the young man driving along the King's Road in Brighton: was there another paying for those two now?—had they another friend now to accompany them every evening? And Maisrie? But all this wild agony lasted only a moment. He cast this palsy of the brain behind him. His better self rose confident and triumphant—though there was still a strange look left in his eyes.

"Paid?" he said, with a kind of scornful impatience. "Who paid? Oh, I did—mostly. What about that? That is nothing—a few shillings—I found it pleasanter not to have to settle bills before a young lady; and of course she did not know who paid; I made an arrangement——"

"An arrangement by which you gave those people their dinner for nothing for months and months!"

"And what then?"

For Vincent had entirely recovered his self-command: he affected to regard this story that had been told him as quite unworthy of serious attention. It was his father who was growing exasperated.

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" Mr. Harris demanded. "Is it nothing that you yourself have shown this old man to be a pauper, getting his dinner on charity every evening? And what better was the girl? She must have known? Do you imagine she was not aware of his receiving money for bogus books that he never meant to publish; and of his inveigling soft-headed Scotchmen—I suppose there must be one here and there—into giving him a loan because of his sham patriotism? And these are the people you have chosen to consort with all this time; and this is the girl you would bring into your family—you would introduce to your friends as your wife! But you cannot be so mad! You may pretend indifference: you cannot be indifferent. You may consider it fine and heroic to disbelieve the clearest evidence: the world, on the other hand, is apt to say that it is only a fool and an idiot who keeps his eyes shut and walks into a trap blindfolded. And—and I do think, when you begin to reflect, that your own common-sense will come to your aid."

He turned to the mantel-piece, and took from it some papers.

"I have given you," he continued, "the sum and substance of the enquiries I have made, in this country and in America. I can show you here still further details; but before allowing you to examine these communications, I must exact a promise that they shall be treated as in strictest confidence."

"Thank you," said Vincent, "I will not trouble you. I can guess at the kind of creature who would accept such a task, and at his interpretation of any facts that might come across him."

Then he rose.

"And is this the important business on which you sent for me?" he asked, but quite civilly.

"You do not think it is important?" the other demanded. "But at least you have been warned. You have been advised to keep your eyes open. You have been shown what kind of people they are who have got hold of you: it is for you yourself to say whether you will be any longer their dupe."

"Very well," said the young man; and he rose and took up his hat and cane. "Oh, by the way, I presume you have come to an end of your enquiries? Because, if not, I would advise your spy—your detective, or whatever he is—not to come prowling to any restaurant or keyhole when I am along with my friends, or he might find things become very unpleasant for him. Good-morning!"

So this was the end of the interview; and Harland Harris shortly thereafter made off for the Athenæum Club, well satisfied that his narrative had produced a far deeper impression than the young man would acknowledge. And in truth it had. When Vincent left the house, and walked away to the solitary little rooms in Mayfair, his face was no longer scornful: it was serious and troubled; for there was much for him to ponder over. Not about Maisrie. He put Maisrie aside. For one thing, he was a little vexed and angry with her at the moment—quite unreasonably, as he strove to convince himself; nevertheless, he would rather not think about her just then; and, indeed, there was no occasion, for the idea that she could be the participator in any fraud or series of frauds was simply not a thinkable thing. He knew better than that; and was content. Maisrie driving with a stranger—perhaps that was not so well done of her; but Maisrie as a skilful and accomplished professional swindler?—then you might expect to see the stars fall from their places in the midnight sky.

But as regards the old man, that was very different; and he

could not deny that there were certain points in the story just told him which were corroborated by his own knowledge. He knew, for example, that George Bethune had got money for one book which, as circumstances would have it, was not produced and published; he knew that those dinners at the Restaurant were paid for by himself; he knew that he had heard Mr. Bethune speak of Cadzow as belonging to his family; and he had to confess that he could not find Craig-Royston in the index of his father's guide-book. And yet he could not give up this magnificent, this heroic old man all at once. He could not believe him to be a mean and crafty trickster. Surely his love for Scotland was sincere. Surely his passionate admiration of the old Scotch ballads was genuine enough. Surely it was not to impose on any one that old George Bethune sang aloud the songs of his youth as he walked through the crowded streets of London. There was a grandeur in his very presence, a dignity in his demeanour, that was far from the artful complaisance of a schemer. Then his undaunted courage—his proud spirit—and above all, the tender and affectionate guardianship he bestowed on his granddaughter: Vincent could not forget all these things. No, nor could he forget how he had enjoyed George Bethune's society on these many and pleasant evenings; and how he had learned more and more to respect him, his unflinching fortitude, his generous enthusiasms, and even, at times, his innocent vanity. He had had a hard life, this old man, and yet he bore no enmity. He had had many trials and misfortunes, many hopes disappointed; yet his temper was not soured. But the conclusive proof, after all, was the character of Maisrie herself—her noble sweetness, her refinement, her sympathy, her quick gratitude for the smallest of kindnesses: could such a beautiful human flower have grown up under the fostering care of an unscrupulous vagabond and knave?

When he got to his rooms, the first thing he did—but with no very definite purpose—was to take up his copy of Black's Guide to Scotland. It was a recent edition; he had got it so that he might trace out that long wandering of which old George Bethune and Maisrie had spoken so often. And mechanically he turned to the index—with which he had been confronted in his father's library; and mechanically he glanced at the successive columns. But what was this?—why here *was* Craig-Royston! His eyes were not deceiving him; for he at once referred to the page indicated, and found Craig-Royston

described as a district in the neighbourhood of Loch Lomond—though, to be sure, he could discover no trace of it on the map. So he had jumped to conclusions all too prematurely? He had allowed that unknown enemy of his—that dark and malignant creature in the background—too facile a triumph? He began to be ashamed of himself. ‘Stand fast, Craig-Royston!’ had not been his motto, as it was that of the proud old man whom he had injured by listening to those childish tales.

He returned to the index, and sought for Balloray. Well, there was no Balloray; but then Balloray was a private house; and private houses, unless of historical interest, are seldom mentioned in guide-books. And then again he bethought him: why, the old ballad!—the ‘bonnie mill-dams o’ Balloray’; surely that was sufficient evidence of there being such a place? He could almost hear George Bethune’s voice as he recalled the opening lines—

‘There were twa sisters lived in a bower;
Balloray, O Balloray;
The youngest o’ them, O she was a flower!
By the bonnie mill-dams o’ Balloray.

There eame a squire frae out the west,
Balloray, O Balloray;
He loved them baith, but the youngest best,
By the bonnie mill-dams o’ Balloray.’

Why, what a fool he had been to be disconcerted by an index—and that the index of some old and obsolete edition! He prosecuted his researches. He turned to Cadzow. Yes, here was Cadzow: Cadzow Castle and Cadzow Forest; and undoubtedly these were the property of the Duke of Hamilton. But might there not be some other property of the same name, as a sort of appanage of Balloray? It was no unusual thing, in Scotland or anywhere else, for two places to have the same name; and in this instance it was the more important one, the ducal one, that would naturally figure in the guide-book. He seemed to see old George Bethune regarding him, with something of a haughty look on his face, as though he would say ‘Of what next will you accuse me?’

Well, all this was very fine and brave; it was a manful struggling with certain phantoms; and he was trying to cheat himself into an elation of confidence. But ever and anon there came to him a consciousness of something behind; something inexplicable; and his thoughts would wander away back to

Brighton. Fugitive lines of that terrible poem of Heine's would come into his brain—*Zu Tafel sassen froh die Gäst' . . . und wie ich nach dem Brautpaar schaut' . . . O weh ! mein Liebchen war die Braut.* He began to imagine for himself what those three had been doing this morning. The weather being so fine, no doubt Mr. Bethune had laid aside his books for the time being; and he and Maisrie would be ready to go out by half-past ten or eleven. Would their new friend call for them, or would there be some place of appointment down in the King's-road? He could see them walk out the West Pier. The old man with the firm-set figure and the flowing white locks would probably be thinking but little of what was going on around him; as likely as not he would be singing gaily to himself about the Pier o' Leith and Berwick Law, and 'leaving thee, my bonnie Mary.' Yes, and so far those two others would be left to themselves; they could talk as they chose—eyes meeting eyes. And what had the bumpkin squire to say? Oh, horses and hounds—the county balls—the famous bin of port to be opened at Christmas. Christmas was coming near now; might there not be an invitation to the two world-wanderers—to come and be hospitably entertained at the big country-house and introduced to friends? And Maisrie—would she think twice?—would she refuse? The old man would consent to anything that promised him present comfort; he accepted favours with a sort of royal complacency; it would matter little to him so long as the fire was bright, the wine good, the company cheerful, and himself allowed a fine latitude of oration. But Maisrie——?

It was nearly four o'clock now. That previous afternoon at Brighton had been a time of misery; and long into the night he had been kept awake by dull and brooding speculation, varied by bitter self-reproach. All the same he felt himself irresistibly drawn thither again; whatever was happening down there by the sea-side he wanted to know; his imaginings were a more cruel torture than anything his eyes could tell him. 'And perhaps—he added to himself, with an ominous darkening of the brows—perhaps there might be a chance of his meeting this rival of his face to face, the better to measure him, and learn what both of them had to expect.

He caught the four-thirty express at Victoria, and got whirled away down. But he did not go to Mrs. Ellison's house, nor yet to the Bedford Hotel, at which his friend Musselburgh was staying; he went to the Bristol, so as to keep himself a little

out of observation. He was lucky enough to get a bedroom; and that was all he required; he did not even wait to look at it; he left the hotel and went wandering down the Marine Parade, which was now a mass of darkness lit up by innumerable points of yellow fire.

Whither away then? If only he knew the street in which they had taken lodgings he could soon find out their daily habits, himself remaining unseen; but he had nothing beyond a vague recollection that they had spoken of some hill behind the town. However, Brighton, though now grown a big place, has a few leading thoroughfares in which everybody who is a visitor is pretty sure to be encountered sooner or later; and in this particular instance it was a good deal sooner than he could have dreamed of.

He was walking along the seaward side of the Parade, with but a casual glance now and again at this or that passer-by, when suddenly, on the other side, at the corner of German Place, three figures came under the glare of a gas-lamp, and these he instantly recognised. Occasionally as they went on they became indistinguishable in the dusk; then again a gas-lamp would bring them into vivid relief—the tall and slim young girl, the square-set old man with the picturesque white hair, the young gentleman with the yellow cover-coat. They were talking together, and walking quickly, for the night was cold.

"Yes," said Vincent to himself, in the bitterness of his heart, "I am displaced and superseded now. Without much difficulty, either. Quickly done. And no doubt he is taking them along to some restaurant. He will hear about the rocks and dales of Scotland—about the ballads and songs—perhaps he has subscribed for the new book. Then they will ask him to go home with them again; and Maisrie will take out her violin; and perhaps—perhaps she will sing '*C'était une frégate, mon joli cœur de rose*'—perhaps she will sing that for him, or any other of the Canadian songs, except the one. But surely, surely, Maisrie will not sing '*La Claire Fontaine*'?"

And then again he said to himself, with his eyes fixed on those three, but most of all on the young girl who walked with so light and joyous a step—

"Ah, I have suffered to-day, you do not know how much, in repelling insinuations brought against you, and in silencing my own doubts; but what do you care? One restaurant is as good as another; one friend as good as another; let the absent expect

to be forgotten, when it is a woman who is asked to remember. *La Claire Fontaine*?—why not *La Claire Fontaine*, for him as well as anyone else? All that past companionship has gone by; here is a new friend to be welcomed with smiles and graces. And as for the old man—what does it matter to him so long as there is someone to settle up the tavern score?"

Nay, his madness of jealousy overmastered him altogether. When they got down to East-street, they did not at once go into the restaurant, for it was yet somewhat early; they began to examine the windows of one or two of the shops, and the trinkets displayed there. And again and again Vincent was on the point of going up to his enemy, and saying "Well, why don't you buy her something? If you haven't got money, I will lend it to you!" Surely this would suffice to provoke a quarrel?—to be settled next morning, out on the downs, and not by any pistol accident or trick of foil, but by a fair stand-up trial of strength, those two facing each other, with clenched fists and set mouth. The young man in the cover-coat was looking at some Austrian garnets: little did he know what wild beast was within springing distance of him.

At length they left the shops, and leisurely strolled along to the Italian restaurant, and entered. Vincent gave them time to get settled, and then followed. He did not wish to interfere with them; he merely wished to see. And when he went upstairs to the room on the first floor, it was with no abashment; he did not slink, he walked resolutely, to a small unoccupied table at the further end; but he was some way from them; perchance he might be able to observe without being noticed. The waiter came to him. "Anything!" was his order: gall and wormwood there were likely to be in any dish that might be brought. Wine?—oh yes, a flask of Chianti—why not a flask of Chianti?—one might fill a glass, and send a message to a faithless friend—a message to recall her to herself for a moment. You who are sitting there, will you not drink to the health of all false lovers—you who are sitting there in such joyful company—*toi qui as le cœur gai*!

He could see them well enough. There was champagne on the table: that was not of George Bethune's ordering: the booby from the swedes and mangold was clearly playing the part of host. And what was she saying to him in return? What form did her thanks take? *Je ne puis rien donner—qu' mon cœur en mariage*: that was easily said; and might mean no more than it meant in the bygone days. Women could so

readily pour out, to any chance new comer, their *petit vin blanc* of gratitude.

But suddenly he became aware of some movement at the table along there; and quickly he lowered his look. Then he knew—he did not see—that someone was coming down the long room. He breathed hard, with a sort of fear—and it was not the fear of any man; he wished he had not come into this place; could he not even now escape?

“Vincent!”

The voice thrilled through him; he looked up; and here was Maisrie Bethune regarding him—regarding him with those eyes so beautiful, so shining, so tender, and reproachful!

“Did you not see us? Why should you avoid us?”

The tone in which she spoke pierced his very heart; but still—but still—there was that stranger at the table yonder.

“I thought you were otherwise engaged,” said he. “I did not wish to intrude.”

“You are unkind.”

Then she stood for a moment uncertain. It was a brave thing for this girl to walk down a long room to address a young man, knowing that more than one pair of eyes would be turned towards her; and here she was standing without any visible aim or errand.

“Won’t you come to our table, Vincent?” she asked hesitatingly.

And then he noticed her embarrassment; and he felt he would be a craven hound not to come to her rescue, whatever the quarrel between them.

“Oh, yes, certainly, if I may,” but with no sort of gladness in his consent; and then he bade the waiter fetch the things along.

She led the way. When he reached the table he shook hands with George Bethune, who appeared more surprised than pleased. Then Maisrie made a faint little kind of introduction as between the young men: Vincent—who had not caught the other’s name—bowed stiffly, and took the seat that had been brought for him. And then, seeing that it was on Maisrie that all the responsibility of this new arrangement had fallen, he forced himself to talk—making apologies for disturbing them, explaining how it was he came to be in Brighton, and begging Maisrie not to take any trouble about him: it was only too kind of her to allow him to join them.

And yet it was very awkward, despite Maisrie’s assiduous

little attentions, and her timid efforts to propitiate everybody. The fresh-complexioned young gentleman stared at the intruder; grew sullen when he observed Maisrie's small kindnesses; and eventually turned to resume his conversation with Mr. Bethune, which had been interrupted. Vincent, who had been ready, on the smallest provocation, to break forth in flame and fury, became contemptuous; he would take no heed of this person; nay, he would make use of the opportunity to show to anyone who might choose to listen on what terms he was with Maisrie.

"Where are you living, Maisrie?" said he, and yet still with a certain stiffness.

She gave him the number in German Place.

"Then we are neighbours, or something near it," he said.

"I am at the Bristol—the Bristol Hotel."

"Oh, really," she made answer. "I thought you had an aunt living in Brighton—the lady who came to see us at Henley."

"Oh, can you remember things as long ago as Henley?" said he. "I did not think a woman's memory could go so far back as that. A week—a day—I thought that was about as much as she could remember."

For a moment she was silent, and wounded; but she was too proud to betray anything to those other two; and she resumed her conversation with Vincent, though with a trifle more of dignity and reserve. As for him, he knew not what to do or say. He could perceive, he could not but perceive, that Maisrie was trying to be kind to him; and he felt himself a sort of renegade; but all the same there was that other sitting at the table—there was an alien presence—and all things were somehow awry. And yet why should he despise that stranger? In the bucolic dandy he could see himself, as he himself was seen by certain of his friends. This other dupe, his successor, had a countrified complexion and a steely blue eye, he wore a horse-shoe pin in diamonds, and had a bit of stephanotis in his buttonhole; but these points of difference were not of much account. And the old man—the old man with the grand air and the oracular speech: no wonder he thought himself entitled to call himself Lord Bethune; but why had he chosen to abate his rank and style? Oh, yes, a striking presence enough—a magnificent presence—with which to cozen shop-keepers!

For indeed this young man's mind was all unhinged. He had had a hard fight of it that day; and perhaps if Maisrie had

known she would have made allowances. What she did clearly see was that her well-meant invitation had been a mistake. She strove her best to remove this embarrassment; she tried to make the conversation general; and in some slight measure she succeeded; but always there was an obvious restraint; there were dark silences and difficult pauses; and, on the part of the young men, a sullen and dangerous antagonism that might at any moment leap forth with a sudden tongue of flame—a retort—an insult.

This hapless entertainment came to an end at last; and, as Vincent had expected, while Maisrie was putting on her cloak, their new friend stepped aside and paid the bill—the bill for three, that is. And the next step? An invitation that the generous host of the evening should go along to the rooms in German Place? There would be tobacco, and Scotch whiskey, and reminiscences of travel, and dissertations on literary and philosophical subjects—and perhaps Maisrie would play for him ‘The Flowers o’ the Forest’ or sing for him ‘Isabeau s’y promène.’ Perhaps the bucolic soul was penetrable by fine melody? There would be whiskey-and-soda, at any rate, and a blazing fire.

And as a matter of fact, when the four of them paused for a second at the door of the restaurant, the new acquaintance did receive that invitation—from George Bethune himself. But he declined.

“Thanks, awfully,” said he, “but I can’t to-night. Fact is, there’s a big billiard match on this evening, and I’ve backed my man for £20, and I may want to hedge a bit if he isn’t in his best form. Some other evening, if you’ll allow me. But to-morrow morning—what are you going to do to-morrow morning? You can’t stay indoors while the weather is so fine; you must leave your work until the wet comes. So I dare say I shall find you somewhere along the front about eleven to-morrow; and if I don’t, why, then, I’ll come along to German Place, and drag you out. For who ever knew such a glorious December?—quite warm in the sun—primroses and violets all a-growing and a-blowing—in the baskets. Good-night to you!—good-night, Miss Bethune!—mind you bring your grandfather along to-morrow morning; or I’ll have to come and drag you both out; good-night—good-night!”—and then with a brief nod to Vincent, which was frigidly returned, he departed.

“You are going our way, Vincent?” Maisrie said, timidly.

"Oh, yes," he made answer, as they set out together.

For a few seconds they walked in silence. But when they had crossed the Old Steine, and got into the Marine Parade, the moon came into view, away over there in the east; it was at the full, but rather dusky, for the north wind had blown the smoke of the town down on the sea-front.

"Did you notice how clear the moon was last night?" she said, to break this embarrassing silence.

"Yes, I did," he said. "I was walking about a good deal last night. The moonlight was beautiful on the water."

"Oh, were you down in Brighton last night?" she asked, rather anxiously.

"Yes."

That was all. She did not dare to ask what had brought him down; and he did not choose to invent an excuse. Again they walked on for a little while in silence, until they reached the corner of German Place.

"Well, good-night!" said George Bethune, holding out his hand. "Quite a surprise to meet you—quite a surprise. Hope we shall see you again before you go back."

And now it was Maisrie's turn.

"Good-night, Vincent!" she said, with her eyes seeking his in mute appeal.

"Good-night," said he; and he did not respond to that look: so these two parted.

And soon, as he walked aimlessly onward, he was away from the town altogether. To him it was a hateful place—with its contrarieties, its disappointments, its distracting problems in human nature. When he turned to look at it, it was like some vast and dusky pit, with a dull, red glow shining over it from its innumerable fires. But here, as he went on again, all was peace. The silver moonlight shimmered on the water. There was not a whisper or murmur along these lofty and solitary cliffs. A cold wind blew from the north, coming over the bare uplands; but it brought no sound of any bird or beast. His shadow was his sole companion—vague and indefinite on the grass, but sharper and blacker on the grey and frosted road. He was alone, and he wished to be alone; and if certain phrases from the *Claire Fontaine* would come following and haunting him—*j'ai perdu ma maîtresse—sans l'avoir mérité—pour un bouquet de roses—que je lui refusai*—he strove to repel them; he would have none of them; nor any remembrance of what was past and gone. The world was sweet to him here, because he was alone

with the sea, and the shore, and the mystic splendour of those shining heavens; and because he seemed to have shaken himself free from the enmities and the treacheries and ingrati- tudes that lay festering in yonder town.

CHAPTER XV.

RENEWING IS OF LOVE.

NEXT morning broke bright and clear, for the north wind had blown freshly all the night, and swept the smoke of the town right out to sea, where it lay along the horizon as a soft saffron-reddish cloud. Accordingly the sky overhead was of a summer-like blue; and the sea was of a shining green, save where it grew opaque and brown as it neared the shore; while the welcome sunlight was everywhere abroad, giving promise of a cheerful day, even now in December. And Vin Harris was standing at a window of the hotel, looking absently out on the wide and empty thoroughfares.

A waiter brought him a note. He glanced at the handwriting with startled eyes, then tore the envelope open. This was what he read.—

“Dear Vincent, I wish to speak with you for a moment if you are not engaged. I am going down to the breakwater, and will wait there for a little while.

“MAISRIE.”

He called to the waiter.

“When did this come?”

“I found it lying on the hall table, sir—just this minute, sir.”

He did not waste time on further questions. In a couple of seconds he was outside and had crossed the road; and there, sure enough—far below him—out on the breakwater—was a solitary figure that he instantly recognised. He went quickly down the steps; he did not stay to ask what this might mean, or to prepare himself in any way; as he approached her, all his anxiety was to know if her eyes were kind—or hostile. Well, they were neither; but there was a certain pride in her tone as she spoke.

"Vincent, you were angry with me last night. Why?"

"Maisrie," said he, "why don't you put up that furred collar round your neck? It is so cold this morning. See, let me put it up for you."

She retreated an inch, declining: she waited for him to answer her question.

"Angry with you?" he said, with obvious constraint. "No, but I was vexed. I was vexed with a lot of things—that I can hardly explain. Not with you personally—at least—well, at any rate I did not mean to offend you. If I have offended you I ask your pardon——"

Here he paused: these stammering sentences were so insufficient. And then all at once he said——

"Maisrie, who was that young man?"

She looked surprised.

"Do you mean Mr. Glover?"

"Glover?—oh, that is his name. But who is he?—what is he?—how did you come to know him so intimately?——"

Perhaps she began to see a little.

"I don't know him at all, Vincent. He is a friend of my grandfather's—or rather he is the son of a friend of my grandfather's—a wine-merchant in London. We met him on the day we came here——"

"And he lost no time in showing off his acquaintance with you," said Vincent, bitterly, "—driving you up and down the King's Road, before all Brighton!"

At this she lowered her head a little.

"I did not wish to go, Vincent. Grandfather pressed me. I did not like to refuse."

"Oh," said he, "I have no right to object. It is not for me to object. If new friends are to be treated as old friends—what does it matter?"

She regarded him reproachfully.

"You know very well, Vincent, that if I had thought it would vex you, I would not have gone—no—nothing in the world would have induced me—nothing! And how cruel it is of you to speak of new friends—and to say that old friends are so quickly forgotten! Is that all you believe of what I have told you many a time? But—but if I have pained you, I am sorry," she continued, still with downcast lashes. "Tell me what you wish me to do. I will not speak to him again, if you would rather I should not. If he comes to the house, I will stay in my own room until he is gone—anything, anything rather

than that you should be vexed. For you have been so kind to me!"

"No, no," said he, hastily. "No, I have been altogether wrong. Do just as you please yourself, Maisrie: that will be the right thing. I have been an ass and a fool to doubt you. But—but it made me mad to think of any man coming between you and me——"

"Vincent!"

She raised her head; and for one ineffable moment her maiden eyes were unveiled and fixed upon him—with such a tenderness and pride and trust as altogether bewildered him and entranced him beyond the powers of speech. For here was confession at last!—her soul had declared itself: no matter what might happen now, he knew she was his own! And yet, when she spoke, it was as if she had divined his thoughts, and would dissipate that too wonderful dream.

"No," she said, rather wistfully, and her eyes were averted again, "that is the last thing you need think about, Vincent; no man will ever come between you and me. No man will ever take your place in my regard—and—and esteem——"

"Is that all, Maisrie?" he said, gently; but in truth that sudden revelation had left him all trembling and overjoyed. He was almost afraid to speak to her, lest she should withdraw that unspoken avowal.

"And—and affection: why should not I say it?—I may not have another chance," she went on. "You need not fear, Vincent. No man will ever come between you and me; but a woman will—and welcome! You will marry—you will be happy—and no one will be better pleased to hear of it all than I shall. And why," she continued, with a kind of cheerfulness, "why, even in that case, should we speak of any one coming between us? We shall have the same affection, the same kind thoughts, even then, I hope——"

"Maisrie, why do you talk like that!" he protested. "You know quite well that you will be my wife—or no one."

She shook her head.

"If you do not see for yourself that it is impossible—if you do not understand, Vincent—then some day I must tell you——"

"Ah, but you have told me something far more important, and only a minute or two ago," said he. "You have told me all I want to know, this very morning! You are not aware of the confession you have made, since you came out on this break-

water? I have seen in your eyes what I never saw before; and everything else is to me as nothing. Difficulties?—I don't believe in them. I see our way as clear as daylight; and there's neither man nor woman coming between us. Oh, yes, I have discovered something this morning—that makes our way clear enough! Maisrie, do you know what wonderful eyes you have?—they can say so many things—perhaps even more than you intend. So much the better—so much the better—for I know they speak true.”

She did not seem to share his joyous confidence.

“I must be going now, Vincent,” she said. “Grandfather will wonder why I am so long in getting his newspapers. And I am glad to know you are no longer vexed with me. I could not bear that. And I will take care you shall have no further cause—indeed I will, Vincent.”

She was for bidding him good-bye, but he detained her: a wild wish had come into his head.

“Maisrie,” said he, with a little hesitation, “couldn't you—couldn't you give me some little thing to keep as a souvenir of this happy morning? Ah, you don't know all you have told me, perhaps! Only some little thing: could you give me a sandal-wood bead, Maisrie—could you cut one off your necklace?—and I will get a small gold case made for it, and wear it always and always, and when I open it, the perfume will remind me of you and of our walks together, and the evenings in that little parlour——”

But instantly she had pulled off her gloves, and with busy fingers unclasped the necklace; then she touched it with her lips, and placed the whole of the warm and scented treasure in his hand.

“I only wanted one of the beads, Maisrie,” said he, with something of shamefacedness.

“Take it, Vincent—I have not many things to give,” she said, simply.

“Then—then would you wear something if I gave it to you?” he asked.

“Oh, yes, if you would like that,” she answered at once.

“Oh, well, I must try to get something nice—something appropriate,” said he. “I wonder if a Brighton jeweller could make me a small white dove in ivory or mother-of-pearl, that you could wear just as if it had alighted on your breast—a pin, you know, for your neck—and the pin could be made of a row of rubies or sapphires—while the dove itself would be white.”

"But, Vincent," she said, doubtingly, "if I were to wear that?"

"What would it mean? Is that what you ask? Shall I tell you, Maisrie? It would mean a betrothal!"

She shrank back.

"No—no," she said. "No—I could not wear that!"

"Oh, are you frightened by a word?" said he, cheerfully. "Very well—very well—it shan't mean anything of the kind! It will only serve to remind you of a morning on which you and I went for a little stroll down a breakwater at Brighton, when the Brighton people were so kind as to leave it all to ourselves. Nothing more than that, Maisrie!—if you wish it. Only you must wear the little white dove—as an emblem of peace and goodwill—and a messenger bringing you good news—and a lot of things like that, that I'm too stupid to put into words. For this is a morning not to be forgotten by either of us, all our lives long, I hope. You think you have not said anything?—then you shouldn't have such tell-tale eyes, Maisrie! And I believe them. I don't believe you when you talk about vague impossibilities. Well, I suppose I must let you go; and I suppose we cannot say good-bye—out here in the open——"

"But you are coming, too, Vincent—a little way?"

"As far as ever you will allow me," said he. "Till the end of life, if you like—and as I hope."

But that was looking too far ahead in the present circumstances.

"What are you going to do to-day, Maisrie?" he asked, as they were leaving the breakwater and making up for the Marine Parade. "Oh, I forgot: you are going out walking at eleven."

She blushed slightly.

"No, Vincent; I think I shall remain at home."

"On a morning like this?—impossible! Why, you must go out in the sunlight. Sunlight is rare in December."

Then she said, with some little embarrassment, "I do not wish to vex you any more, Vincent. If I went out with grandfather, we should meet Mr. Glover——"

"Mr. Glover?" he said, interrupting her. "Dearest Maisrie, I don't mind if you were to go walking with twenty Mr. Glovers!—I don't mind that *now*. It is the sunlight that is of importance; it is getting you into the sunlight that is everything. And if Mr. Glover asks you to go driving with him in the afternoon, of course you must go!—it will interest

you to see the crowd and the carriages, and it will keep you in the fresh air. Oh, yes, if I'm along in the King's Road this afternoon, I shall look out for you; and if you should happen to see me, then just remember that you have given me your sandalwood necklace, and that I am the proudest and happiest person in the whole town of Brighton. Why, of course you must go out, both morning and afternoon," he continued, in this gay and generous fashion, as they were mounting the steps towards the upper thoroughfare. "Sunlight is just all the world, for flowers, and pretty young ladies, and similar things; and now you're away from the London fogs, you must make the best of it. It is very wise of your grandfather to lay aside his work while the fine weather lasts. Now be a good, sensible girl, and go out at eleven o'clock."

"Vincent," she said, "if I do go with grandfather this morning, will you come down the town and join us?"

"Oh, well," said he, rather hesitating, "I—I do not wish to inflict myself on anybody. But don't mistake, Maisrie: I shall be quite happy, even if I see you walking up and down with the purveyor of bad sherry. It won't vex me in the least: something you told me this morning has made me proof against all that. The important thing is that you should keep in the sunlight!"

"I ask you to come, Vincent."

"Oh, very well, certainly," said he—not knowing what dark design was in her mind.

He was soon to discover. When he left her in St. James's-street, whither she had gone to get the morning newspapers for her grandfather, he went back to the hotel, and to his own room, to take out this priceless treasure of a necklace she had bestowed on him, and to wonder how best he could make of it a cunning talisman that he could have near his heart night and day. And also he set to work to sketch out designs for the little breast-pin he meant to have made, with its transverse row of rubies or sapphires, with its white dove in the centre. An inscription? That was hardly needed: there was a sufficient understanding between him and her. And surely this was a betrothal, despite her timid shrinking back? The avowal of that morning had been more to him than words; during that brief moment it seemed as if Heaven shone in her eyes; and as if he could see there, as in a vision, all the years to come—all the years that he and she were to be together—shining with a soft celestial radiance. And would not this

small white dove convey its message of peace?—when it lay on her bosom, “so light, so light.”

Then all of a sudden it occurred to him—why, he had been talking and walking with an adventuress, a begging-letter impostor, a common swindler, and had quite forgotten to be on his guard! All the solemn warnings he had received had entirely vanished from his mind when he was out there on the breakwater with Maisrie Bethune. He had looked into her eyes—and never thought of any swindling! Had this sandal-wood necklace—that was sweet with a fragrance more than its own—that seemed to have still some lingering warmth in it, borrowed from its recent and secret resting-place—been given him as a lure? The white dove—significant of all innocence, and purity, and peace—was that to rest on the heart of a traitress? Well, perhaps; but it did not appear to concern him much, as he got his hat and cane, and pulled on a fresh pair of gloves, and went out into the open air.

Nay, he was in a magnanimous mood towards all mankind. He would not even seek to interfere with Sherry, as he mentally and meanly styled his rival. If it pleased the young gentleman in the cover-coat to walk up and down the King's Road with Maisrie Bethune—very well. If he took her for a drive after luncheon, that would amuse her, and also was well. The time for jealous dread, for angry suspicions, for reproachful accusations, was over and gone. A glance from Maisrie's eyes had banished all that. Sherry might parade his acquaintance-ship as much as he chose, so long as Maisrie was kept in the open air and the sunlight: that was the all-important point.

By-and-bye he went away down to the King's Road, and very speedily espied the three figures he expected to find there, though as yet they were at some distance. They were coming towards him: in a few minutes he would be face to face with them. And he had made up his mind what he meant to do. Maisrie should see that he was actuated no longer by jealous rage; that he had confidence in her; that he feared no rival now. And so it was that when they came near, he merely gave them a general and pleasant “Good-morning!” and raised his hat to Maisrie, and was for passing on. But he had reckoned without his host—or hostess rather.

“Vincent!” said Maisrie, in expostulation.

Then he stopped.

“Aren't you coming with us? We are going along to the Chain Pier, to get out of the crowd. Won't you come?”

"Oh, yes, if I may!" said he, gladly enough—and he knew that the other young man was staring, not to say scowling, at this unwelcome intrusion.

Now Maisrie had been walking between her grandfather and young Glover; but the moment that Vincent joined the little party, she fell behind.

"Four abreast are too many," said she. "We must go two and two; grandfather, will you lead the way with Mr. Glover?"

It was done, and dexterously done, in a moment; and if the selection of the new comer as her companion was almost too open and marked, perhaps that was her intention. At all events, when the two others had moved forward, Vincent said in an undertone—

"This is very kind of you, Maisrie."

And she replied, rather proudly—

"I wished to show you that I could distinguish between old and new friends."

Then he grew humble.

"Maisrie," said he, "don't you treasure up things against me! It was only a phrase. And just remember how I was situated. I came away down to Brighton merely to catch a glimpse of you; and about the first thing I saw was this young fellow, whom I had never heard of, driving you up and down among the fashionable crowd. You see, Maisrie, you hadn't given me the sandal-wood necklace then; and what is of far more consequence, you hadn't allowed your eyes to tell me what they told me this morning. So what was I to think? No harm of you, of course; but I was miserable;—and—and I thought you could easily forget; and all the afternoon I looked out for you; and all the evening I wandered about the streets, wondering whether you would be in one of the restaurants or the hotels. If I could only have spoken a word with you! But then, you know, I had been in a kind of way shut off from you; and—and there was this new acquaintance—"

"I am very sorry, Vincent," she said also in a low voice. "It seems such a pity that one should vex one's friends unintentionally; because in looking back, you like to think of their always being pleased with you; and then again there may be no chance of making up—and you are sorry when it is too late——"

"Come, come, Maisrie," he said with greater freedom—for some people had intervened, and the other two were now a little

way ahead, "I am not going to let you talk in that way. You always speak as if you and I were to be separated——"

"Wouldn't it be better, Vincent?" she said, simply.

"Why?"

"Why?" she repeated, in an absent kind of way. "Well, you know nothing about us, Vincent."

"I have been told a good deal of late, then!" he said, in careless scorn.

And the next instant he wished he had bitten his tongue out ere making that haphazard speech. The girl looked up at him with a curious quick scrutiny—as if she were afraid.

"What have you been told, Vincent?" she demanded, in quite an altered tone.

"Oh, nothing!" he said, with disdain. "A lot of rubbish! Every one has good-natured friends, I suppose, who won't be satisfied with minding their own business. And although you may laugh at the moment, at the mere ridiculousness of the thing, still, if it should happen that just at the same time you should see some one you are very fond of—in—in a position that you can't explain to yourself—well, then—— But what is the use of talking, Maisrie! I confess that I was jealous out of all reason, jealous to the verge of madness; but then I paid the penalty, in hours and hours of misery; and now you come along and heap coals of fire on my head, until I am so ashamed of myself that I don't think I am fit to live. And that's all about it; and my only excuse is that you had not told me then what your eyes told me this morning."

She remained silent and thoughtful for a little while; but as she made no further reference to his inadvertent admission that he had heard certain things of herself and her grandfather, he inwardly hoped that that unlucky speech had gone from her memory. Moreover, they were come to the Chain Pier; and as those two in front waited for them, so that they should go through the turnstile one after the other, there was just then no opportunity for further confidential talking. But once on the Pier, old George Bethune, who was eagerly discoursing on some subject or another (with magnificent emphasis of arm and stick) drew ahead again, taking his companion with him. And Vin Harris, regarding the picturesque figure of the old man, and his fine enthusiastic manner, which at all events seemed so sincere, began to wonder whether there could be any grains of truth in the story that had been told him or whether it was a

complete and malevolent fabrication. His appearance and demeanour, certainly, were not those of a professional impostor : it was hard to understand how a man of his proud and blunt self-assertion could manage to wheedle wine merchants and tailors. Had he really called himself Lord Bethune; or was it not far more likely that some ignorant colonial folk, impressed by his talk of high lineage and by his personal dignity, had bestowed on him that title? The young man—guessing and wondering—began to recall the various counts of that sinister indictment; and at last he said to his companion, in a musing kind of way—

“Maisrie, you know that motto your grandfather is so proud of: ‘Stand Fast, Craig-Royston;’ Have you any idea where Craig-Royston is?”

“I? No, not at all,” she said simply.

“You have never been there?”

“Vincent!” she said. “You know I have never been in Scotland.”

“Because there is such an odd thing in connection with it,” he continued. “In one edition of Black’s Guide to Scotland, Craig-Royston is not mentioned anywhere; and in another it is mentioned, but only in a footnote. And I can’t find it in the map. You don’t know if there are any people of your name living there now?”

“I am sure I cannot say,” she made answer. “Grandfather could tell you; he is always interested in such things.”

“And Balloray,” he went on, “I could find no mention of Balloray; but of course there must be such a place?”

“I wish there was not,” she said, sadly. “It is the one bitter thing in my grandfather’s life. I wish there never had been any such place. But I have noticed a change in him of late. He does not complain now as he used to complain; he is more resigned; indeed, he seldom talks of it. And when I say complain, that is hardly the word. Don’t you think he bears his lot with great fortitude? I am sure it is more on my account than his own that he ever thinks of the estate that was lost. And I am sure he is happier with his books than with all the land and money that could be given to him. He seems to fancy that those old songs and ballads belong to him; they are his property; he is happier with them than with a big estate and riches.”

“I could not find Balloray in the index to the Guide,” Vincent resumed, “but of course there must be such a place—

there is the ballad your grandfather is so fond of—‘The bonnie mill-dams o’ Balloray.’”

She looked up suddenly, with some distress in her face.

“Vincent, don’t you understand? Don’t you understand that grandfather is easily taken with a name—with the sound of it—and sometimes he confuses one with another? That ballad is not about Balloray; it is about Binnorie; it is ‘The bonnie mill-dams o’ Binnorie.’ Grandfather forgets at times; and he is used to Balloray; and that has got into his head in connection with the ballad. I thought perhaps you knew.”

“Oh, no,” said he, lightly, for he did not attach any great importance to this chance confusion. “The two words are not unlike; I quite see how one might take the place of the other. Of course you will make sure that he puts in the right name when he comes to publish the volume.”

And so they walked up and down the almost deserted pier, in the bright sunlight, looking out on the lapping green waters, or up to the terraced yellow houses above the tall cliffs. Sometimes, of course, the four of them came together; and more than once the horsey-looking young gentleman insidiously tried to detach Maisrie from her chosen companion—and tried in vain. At last, when it became about time for them to be going their several ways home, he made a bold stroke.

“Come, Mr. Bethune,” said he, as they were successively passing through the turnstile, “I want you and Miss Bethune to take pity on a poor solitary bachelor, and come along and have a bit of lunch with me at the Old Ship. It will be a little change for you, won’t it?—and we can have a private room if you prefer that.”

The old gentleman seemed inclined to close with this offer; but he glanced towards Maisrie for her acquiescence first.

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Glover,” said she, promptly; “but I have everything arranged at our lodgings; and we must not disappoint our landlady. Some other time, perhaps, thank you! Good morning!”

Then the moment he was gone, she turned to her companion.

“Vincent, have you any engagement? No? Then, will you be very courageous and come with us and take your chance? I can promise you a biscuit at least.”

“And I’m sure I don’t want anything more,” said he, most gratefully; for surely she was trying her best to show him that she distinguished between old and new friends.

And then again, when they reached the rooms, and when the three of them were seated at table, she waited upon him with a gentle care and assiduity that were almost embarrassing. He wished the wretched things at the bottom of the sea: why should commonplace food and drink interfere with his answering Maisrie's eyes, or thinking of her overwhelming kindness? As for old George Bethune, the sharp air and the sunlight had given him an admirable appetite; and he allowed the young people to amuse themselves with little courtesies, and attentions, and protests just as they pleased. Cheese and celery were solid and substantial things: he had no concern about a drooping eyelash, or some pretty, persuasive turn of speech.

And yet he was not unfriendly towards the young man.

"Wouldn't you like to go to the theatre this evening, Maisrie?" Vincent asked. "It is the *Squire's Daughter*. I know you've seen it already; but I could go a dozen times—twenty times—the music is so delightful. And the travelling company is said to be quite as good as the London one: Miss Kate Burgoyne has changed into it, you know, and I shouldn't wonder if she sung all the better because of the £3000 damages that Sir Percival Miles has had to pay her. Shall I go along and see if I can get a box?"

"What do you say, grandfather?" the girl asked.

"Oh, yes—very well, very well," said he, in his lofty way. "A little idleness more or less is not of much account. But we must begin to work soon, Maisrie; fresh air and sunlight are all very well; but we must begin to work—while the day is with us, though luckily one has not to say to you as yet—*jam te premet nox, fabulæque Manes, et domus exilis Plutonia*."

"Then if we go to the theatre," said Maisrie, "Vincent must come in here for a little while on his way home; and you and he will have a smoke together; and it will be quite like old times."—And Vincent looked at her, as much as to say, 'Maisrie, don't make me too ashamed: haven't you forgiven me yet for that foolish phrase?'

The afternoon passed quickly enough: to Vincent every moment was golden. Then in the evening they went to the theatre; and the young people at least were abundantly charmed with the gay costumes, the pretty music, and the fun and merriment of the bright little operetta. George Bethune seemed less interested. He sate well back in the box, his face in shadow; and although his eyes, from under those shaggy eyebrows, were fixed on the stage, it was in an absent fashion,

as if he were thinking of other things. And indeed he was thinking of far other things; for when, after the piece was over, those three set out to walk home through the dark streets, Maisrie and Vincent could hear the old man, who walked somewhat apart from them, reciting to himself, and that in a proud and sustained voice. It was not the frivolity of comic opera that he had in his mind; it was something of finer and sterner stuff; as they crossed by the Old Steine, where there was a space of silence, they could make out clearly what this was—

‘Thy faith and troth thou sall na get,
And our true love sall never twin,
Until ye tell what comes of women,
I wot, who die in strong travailing?’

‘Their beds are made in the heavens high,
Down at the foot of our good Lord’s knee,
Weel set about wi’ gillyflowers,
I wot sweet company for to see.

‘O cocks are crowing a merry midnight,
I wot the wild-fowl are boding day;
The psalms of heaven will soon be sung,
And I, ere now, will be missed away.’

There was a curiously solemn effect about this solitary voice, here in the dark. The old man did not seem to care whether he was overheard or not; it was entirely to himself that he was repeating the lines of the old ballad. And thereafter he walked on in silence, while the two lovers, busy with their own little world, were murmuring nothings to each other.

But Maisrie, for one, was soon to be recalled to the actualities, and even grim incongruities, of every day life. When they reached their lodgings the servant girl, who opened the door to them, paused for a second and looked up and down the street.

“Yes, sir, there he is,” said she.

“Who?” George Bethune demanded.

“A man who has been asking for you, sir—and said he would wait.”

At the same moment there came out of the gloom a rather shabby-looking person.

“Mr. George Bethune?” he said.

“Yes, that is my name,” the old man answered, impatiently; probably he suspected.

“Something for you, sir,” said the stranger, handing a folded piece of paper—and therewith he left.

It was all the work of a second; and the next instant they were indoors, and in the little parlour; but in that brief space of time a great change had taken place. Indeed, Maisrie's mortification was a piteous thing to see; it seemed so hard she should have had to endure this humiliation under the very eyes of her lover; she would not look his way at all; she busied herself with putting things on the table; her downcast face was overwhelmed with confusion and shame. For surely Vincent would know what that paper was? The appearance of the man—his hanging about—her grandfather's angry frown—all pointed plainly enough. And that it should happen at the end of this long and happy day—this day of reconciliation—when she had tried so assiduously to be kind to him—when he had spoken so confidently of the future that lay before them! It was as if some cruel fate had interposed to say to him: 'Now you see the surroundings in which this girl has lived: and do you still dream of making her your wife?'

And perhaps old George Bethune noticed this shame and vexation on the part of his granddaughter, and may have wished to divert attention from it; at all events, when he had brewed his toddy, and lit his pipe, and drawn his chair in towards the fire, he set off upon one of his monologues, quite in the old garrulous vein; and he was as friendly towards Vincent as though this visit had been quite anticipated. Maisrie sat silent and abashed; and Vincent, listening vaguely, thought it was all very fine to have a sanguine and happy-go-lucky temperament, but that he—that is, the younger man—would be glad to have this beautiful and pensive creature of a girl removed into altogether different circumstances. He knew why she was ashamed and downcast—though, to be sure, he said to himself that the serving of a writ was no tremendous cataclysm. Such little incidents must necessarily occur in the career of any one who had such an arrogant disdain of pounds and pence as her grandfather professed. But that Maisrie should have to suffer humiliation: that was what touched him to the quick. He looked at her—at her beautiful and wistful eyes, and the sensitive lines of her profile and under-lip; and his heart bled for her. And all this following upon her outspoken avowal of that morning seemed to demand some more definite and immediate action on his part—when once the quiet of the night had enabled him to consider his position.

When he rose to leave, he asked them what they meant to do the next day. But Maisrie would hardly say anything; she

seemed rather to wish him to go, so distressed and disheartened she was. And go he did, presently; but he bore away with him no hurt feeling on account of his tacit dismissal. He understood all that; and he understood her. And as he went away home through the dark, he began to recall the first occasions on which he had seen Maisrie Bethune walking in Hyde Park with her grandfather; and the curious fancies that were then formed in his own mind—that here apparently was a beautiful, and sensitive, and suffering soul that ought to be rescued and cheered and comforted, were one found worthy to be her champion and her friend. Her friend?—she had confessed he was something more than that on this very morning. Her lover, then?—well, her lover ought to be her champion too, if only the hours of the night would lend him counsel.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE BRINK.

NAY, he could see but the one clear and resolute way out of all these perplexities, which was that he should forthwith and without further preamble marry Maisrie Bethune: thereafter his relatives might do or say whatever it most pleased them to do or say. This would be his answer to the vague but persistent suspicions of Mrs. Ellison, and to the more precise but none the less preposterous accusations of his father. Then as regards Maisrie herself, would not this conclusive act banish all those dim presentiments and alarms with which she seemed to regard the future? And if her present circumstances involved her in humiliation, he would take her out of these. As for old George Bethune, ought he not to welcome this guardianship that would succeed his own? The happiness of his granddaughter seemed to be his first care; and here was a stay and bulwark for her, a protection for her when his own should be withdrawn in the natural course of things.

This solution of the difficulty seemed reasonable and simple, though sometimes his arguments would suddenly get lost in a flood of wild wonder and joy; and entrancing visions of that pretty canary-cage he meant to secure—down by Chelsea way,

perhaps, or up about Campden Hill, or it might be out among some suburban gardens—would interfere with the cool and accurate representations he was preparing to lay before his friends. For after all, simple as the solution appeared, there were ways and means to be considered. Vincent was now about to discover—nay, he already perceived—that for a young man to be brought up without any definite calling meant a decided crippling of his independence. The canary-cage, charming and idyllic as it might be, would cost something, even if he went as far as Shepherd's Bush or Hammersmith; and the little fortune that had been left him did not produce much of an annual income. Then again his father: would not the great socialist (on paper) instantly withdraw the handsome allowance he had hitherto made, on hearing that his son contemplated marrying that dangerous person, that low-born adventuress, that creature of the slums? For Vincent Harris was not given to disguising things from himself. He knew that these were the phrases which his father would doubtless apply to Maisrie Bethune. Not that they or any other phrases were of much import: the capitalist-communist was welcome to invent and use as many as he chose. But his opposition to this marriage, which was almost to be counted on, might become a very serious affair for everybody concerned.

Next morning Vincent was up betimes; and at an early hour he went along to the Bedford Hotel. He was told that Lord Musselburgh was in the coffee-room; and thither he accordingly proceeded.

"Oh, yes, I'll have some breakfast, thank you," said he, as he took a seat at the small table. "Anything—anything. The fact is, Musselburgh, I want to speak to you, if you can give me a little time. Something of importance, too—to me at least——"

"Let me tell you this, Vin, first of all," said the elder of the two young men, with a smile. "You'll have to make your peace with Mrs. Ellison. She is mortally offended at the notion of your coming to Brighton, and going to a hotel. I suppose you imagine she didn't know you had come down? We saw you yesterday."

"Where?" said Vincent, quickly.

"In the Marine Parade. We followed you some little way—if you had turned round you would have seen us."

"What time?"

"Why, about one, I should think."

"Then—then you saw——"

"Yes, we saw——" said the other.

There was a moment's silence; Vin's eyes were fixed on his companion with a curious expectancy and prayer; had this friend of his, if he were a friend at all, no approving word to say about Maisrie?

Well, Lord Musselburgh was an exceedingly good-natured young man; and on this occasion he did not allow a selfish discretion to get the better of him.

"I don't know that I intended to tell you," said he. "Fact is, Mrs. Ellison hinted that I'd better follow her example; and have nothing to say on a certain subject; but really, Vin, really—I had no idea—really——"

"Yes?—what?" said Vincent, rather breathlessly.

"Well, to be candid with you, I never was so surprised in my life! Why, you remember that afternoon in Piccadilly, when I first saw them—perhaps I did not pay much attention to the girl—she seemed a slip of a thing—pretty, oh, yes, pretty enough; but yesterday—when I saw her yesterday—by George, she's grown to be one of the most beautiful creatures I ever beheld! And so distinguished-looking—and apparently so unconscious of it, too! Again and again I noticed people half-turn their heads to get another glimpse of her as she went by—and no wonder—why, really such a carriage—such an air of distinction and quiet self-possession, for all she looked so young—I never was so surprised in all my life! Oh, a most beautiful creature!—and that I must say in common honesty, whatever comes of it."

Nay, the very incoherence of his praise was proof of its sincerity; and Vincent's face burned with pleasure and pride. How could sweeter words have been poured into a lover's ears?

"Did you chance to notice her hair?—did you?" said he, eagerly. "Did you chance to see the sunlight on it? And—and you were behind her—you must have seen how she walked—the lightness and grace of her step. Mind you, Musselburgh," he went on—and his breakfast received but scant attention, now that he had found some one to whom he could talk on this enchanting and all-engrossing theme. "A light and graceful step means far more than mere youth and health—it means a perfect and supple figure as well. Did you think she was rather pale?" he asked—but only to answer his own question. "Yes, I dare say you might think she was rather pale. But that is not because she is delicate—oh, dear, no!—not in the least: it is the natural fineness of her com-

plexion; and when brisk walking, or a cold wind blowing, brings colour into her cheeks, then that is all the rarer and more beautiful. Of course you couldn't see her eyes at all?—she doesn't stare at people in the streets; she seems to find the sea more interesting when we are walking up and down; but they are the clearest, the most expressive, eyes you could imagine! She hardly has to speak—she has only to look! I do think blue-grey is by far the prettiest colour of eyes; they vary so much; I've seen Maisrie Bethune's eyes quite distinctly blue—that is when she is very strong and well, and out in the open air. I don't suppose it possible that any reflection from the sky or sea can affect the colour of the eyes; it must be simply that she is in the fresh air, and stimulated with exercise and happy——” He paused for a second. “Is there anything so very amusing?”

“To tell you the truth, Vin,” his companion admitted, “I was thinking that when you came in you announced you had something of importance to say——”

“Instead of which I have been talking about Miss Bethune,” Vincent said, without taking any offence. “But who began? I thought it was you who introduced the subject—and you seemed interested in her appearance——”

“Oh, yes, of course, of course,” the young nobleman said, good-naturedly. “I beg your pardon. And I understand how the subject may be of importance to you——”

“Well, yes, it is,” said Vincent, calmly. “For I propose to marry Miss Bethune, and at once, if she will consent.”

Lord Musselburgh looked up quickly, and his face was grave enough now.

“You don't mean that, Vin?”

“That is precisely what I do mean,” the young man said.

“I thought—I had fancied—that certain things had been found out,” his friend stammered, and then stopped; for it was a hazardous topic.

“Oh, you have been told too?” Vincent said, with a careless disdain. “Well, when I heard those charges brought against Miss Bethune's grandfather, I did not choose to answer them; but speaking about him to you is another thing; and I may say to you, once for all, that more preposterous trash was never invented. I won't deny,” he continued, with a perfectly simple frankness, “that there are one or two things about Mr. Bethune that I cannot quite explain—that I rather shut my eyes to; and perhaps there are one or two things that one might wish

altered—for who is perfect? But the idea that this old man, with his almost obtrusively rugged individuality, his independence, his self-will and pride, should be a scheming impostor and swindler—it is too absurd! To my mind—and I think I know him pretty intimately—he appears to be one of the finest and grandest characters it is possible to imagine; a personality you could never forget, once you had learned to know him even a little; and that this man, of all men, should be suspected of being a fawning and wheedling writer of begging-letters—it is too laughable! I admit that he has little or no money—if that is a crime. They live in straitened circumstances, no doubt. And of course there are many unpleasant things connected with poverty that one would rather hide from the eyes of a young lady, and that can't well be hidden: though I don't know that her nature, if she has a fine and noble nature, need suffer from that. For example, it isn't nice for her to see her grandfather served with a writ; but many excellent people have been served with writs; it doesn't follow that Mr. Bethune must be a thief because he has no money—or perhaps because he has been negligent about some debt or other. But even supposing that he was a questionable person—even supposing that he was in the habit of using doubtful means to supplement his precarious income; isn't that all the greater reason why such a girl should be taken away from such circumstances?"

Lord Musselburgh did not reply to this question. He had heard from Mrs. Ellison that the granddaughter was suspected, or more than suspected, of being an accomplice; and although, of course, he could not in the least say whether there was any truth in this allegation, he deemed it wiser to hold his tongue.

"Now you may put all that aside," Vincent went on. "That is all rubbish and trash—a pack of old wives' stories. And what I want of you, Musselburgh, is to give me your honest opinion on a certain point. I ask for your advice. I want you to tell me what you think would happen in a possible case. And the main question is this: assuming that I could persuade Miss Bethune to marry me at once, and assuming also that her grandfather approved—when the marriage had actually taken place, what would my relatives say? Or rather that is not the question: the question is what they would do. I know what they would say. They would be wild enough. Their heads are full of these foolish fancies and suspicions; and besides that, I gather that they want me to marry some noble damsel whose family would have political influence.

Yes, they would be wild enough, no doubt; but when they found the thing actually settled, what would they do? Would my father make a deadly quarrel of it and cut me off with a shilling, like something out of a play; or would he exercise a little common-sense, and make the best of it, seeing the thing was done?"

"Really," said Musselburgh, who seemed more concerned than one might have expected from his half-cynical, half-careless temperament, "you ask me what I can't answer. And giving advice is a perilous business. All I can say is this, Vin—you seem to me to have got into a devilish awkward position, and I wish to goodness you were out of it."

"You think I regret anything that has happened?" Vincent said. "Not I! I would not go back—not for all the world. But as for this monetary difficulty, there it is; and it has to be faced. You see, I have been brought up to do nothing; and consequently I am in a measure dependent on my father. My own little income doesn't amount to much. Then again, if I were to marry Maisrie Bethune, I should have to leave her grandfather whatever small fund they have—I don't quite understand about it—anyhow, I couldn't take that away, for I imagine the old gentleman's earnings from newspaper work are not very substantial or regular. Now what do you think my father would do?"

"Wouldn't it be the simplest thing to go and ask him—to go and ask him now?" said Lord Musselburgh, who clearly did not wish to assume any responsibility in this serious matter.

"I can tell myself what he would say now," Vincent made answer; "the question is what he would say then."

"After the marriage?"

"Yes."

His companion across the little table hesitated for a second or two.

"You see, Vin, it isn't only in plays that fathers get angry—unfortunately, it sometimes happens in real life; and occasionally they get very angry indeed. According to your own showing, if your father refused to acknowledge this marriage—if he declared he would have nothing further to do with you—you would find yourself in rather desperate straits. Why should you, with your eyes open, walk into any such straits? You know what *may* happen. And then—with a young wife—with next to no resources—what would you do? Let us come

to one definite and immediate thing, that I hope is not far off now; who would pay your election expenses at Mendover?"

"You yourself, Musselburgh, in the interests of the party!"

"I am glad you can make a jest of the situation, Vin——"

"No, really, I don't," Vincent said, more seriously. "But if I were to ask for my father's consent I should not get it—I know that quite well; and meanwhile this girl is supposed to be—oh, I need not name the things! You don't understand! She is my dearest in all the world; how can I stand by and allow these base accusations to be brought against her, without protest? And that would be my protest! That would show them what I thought of their mean suspicions and their preposterous charges."

"And thereafter?" said Lord Musselburgh.

"Thereafter? Well, as I say, my father might show some common sense and accept the thing, seeing it was done. I can tell you it isn't very pleasant to find myself so dependent on any other human being's reasonableness. I haven't been used to it. I dare say I have been spoiled—things made too easy for me. And now when I look round and wonder what I could turn to, I suppose I am simply in the position of a thousand others, who haven't had any special training. The few articles I have written have paid me well enough; but at present I don't see anything substantial and permanent in that direction. If you were in office I should ask you for a private secretaryship——"

"Why not ask someone who is in office?"

"I could not change my coat quite so quickly as that."

"Ah, you haven't had much experience in practical politics," Lord Musselburgh observed. "Well, now, Vin, look here: it seems to me you are on the brink of a tremendous catastrophe. You have asked for my advice; I will give it to you frankly. For goodness sake don't marry that girl! She may be everything you say; her grandfather may be everything you say; but don't do anything rash—don't do anything irrevocable. And consider this: if your relations should look on such a marriage with disfavour, it is in your own interest; it is no selfish wish on their part that you should marry well—marry in your own sphere—marry some one who would do you credit and be a fit companion for you. Mind you, I say nothing against Miss Bethune—nothing; I would not even if I could—I am not such a fool—for I should simply anger you without convincing you; but just consider for a moment what her experiences must have been. You know what

Mrs. Ellison so frequently talks about—the sentimental fallacy of supposing that there is anything intrinsically noble or beautiful about poverty. I'm afraid she's right. I am afraid that poverty is altogether a debasing and brutalising thing, destroying self-respect, stunting the mind as well as the body."

"Yes," said Vin Harris, rather scornfully, "I am quite aware that is the opinion of poverty held by the rich. They show it. They profess to believe what the Sermon on the Mount says about the Kingdom of Heaven being reserved for the poor; but catch any single man-jack of them putting aside his riches in order to secure that other inheritance! Not much! He prefers the Kingdom he has got—in consols."

"I was only wondering," Musselburgh said, with a little hesitation, "what influence those—those associations might have had on Miss Bethune herself. Not the best training for a young girl perhaps?"

"If she had been brought up in a thieves' den," said Vincent, hotly, "she would have remained the pure and beautiful-souled creature that she is now. But I see there is no use talking. I have asked for your advice—for your opinion; and you have given it to me. I thank you, and there's an end."

He rose. But his friend also rose at the same moment.

"No, no, Vin, you're not going to quarrel with me. Come into the smoking-room, and we'll have a cigarette."

Nor did he wish to quarrel. They left the coffee-room together. But as luck would have it, in crossing the hall, he chanced to look towards the front door; and behold! all the outer world was shining in clear sunlight. It suddenly occurred to this young man that he had been sitting plunged in gloom, listening to coward counsels, regarding the future as something dark; while there—out there—the golden pavements, and the far-shimmering sea, and the wide white skies spoke only of hope, and seemed to say that Maisrie would soon be coming along, proud and tall and sweet. Why, it was to her that he ought to have appealed—not to any timorous, vacillating temporiser; it was her hands he ought to have taken and held, that he might read the future in her true eyes. And so, with some brief words of apology and thanks, he left Lord Musselburgh, and made his way into the outer air: this was to breathe more freely—this was to have the natural courage of youth mounting into the brain.

He walked away along the King's Road; and unconsciously

to himself he held his head erect; as if in imitation of the stout-hearted old man who, despite his threescore years and ten, could still bear himself so bravely in face of all the world. Moreover, there were some lines in one of Maisrie's songs haunting him; but not in any sad way; nay, he found himself dwelling on the *r*'s, as if to recall her soft pronunciation:—

*Elle fit un' rencontre
De trente matelots,
De trente matelots
Sur le bord de l' île.*

He had thrust aside those pusillanimous counsels: out here was the sunlight and the fresh-blowing wind; his soul felt freer; he would gain new courage from Maisrie's eyes. This was the kind of morning to bring a touch of crimson to the transparent pallor of her cheek; her teeth would glisten when she laughed; her graceful step would be lighter, more buoyant than ever. *Sursum corda!* Nay, he could have found it in his heart to adopt the proud-sounding 'Stand Fast, Craig-Royston!'—if only to fling it back in the face of those who had brought those monstrous accusations.

His long and swinging stride soon carried him to the house in German Place, where he found George Bethune and his granddaughter just making ready to come out.

"This will not do, Maisrie," said old George Bethune, in his gay, emphatic fashion. "Too much idleness. Too much idleness. Fresh air is all very well; but we must not become its slaves. Remember Horace's warning. '*Tu, nisi ventis debes ludibrium, cave.*'"

"Why, who could keep at work on a morning like this!" Vincent protested. "A west wind and brilliant sunlight are not so common in December. It makes it hard for me that I've to go away to-morrow."

"Are you going away to-morrow, Vincent?" said Maisrie, regarding him.

"Yes," said he. "I have to go down to Mendover on Thursday, to deliver a sort of address—a lecture—and I've only got the heads and divisions sketched out as yet. I wish I could escape it altogether; but I dare not play any tricks at present; I'm on my best behaviour. And this time at least I don't mean to drag Lord Musselburgh down with me; I'm going alone."

"And after that you return to London?" she asked.

He hardly knew what to say. A single word of encouragement from either of them, and he would at once and gladly have promised to come back to Brighton at the earliest possible moment; but he had not forgotten the implied understanding on which Maisrie and her grandfather had come away from their lodgings in Mayfair.

"Yes, to London," he replied vaguely. "But I have no definite plans at present. I dare say my aunt, Mrs. Ellison, will want me to come down here at Christmas."

When they were outside, and had gone on to the Parade, he besought his two companions, instead of taking their accustomed stroll into the town, to come away out into the country. The Downs, he said, would be looking very cheerful on so pleasant a morning. And of course it mattered little to them whither they went. They acceded at once; and by-and-bye they had left the wide thoroughfare and the houses behind them, and were walking along the soft turf, alone with the cliffs, and the sea, and the smooth, faintly-coloured uplands. The spring-time was not yet; but there were hues of green and red in those far-stretching breadths of soil; and the sky was of a cloudless blue.

And how strange it was that out here in the open, in the clear sunlight, those dark imaginings of the Private Inquiry Offices seemed to fall helplessly away from these two friends of his, and they themselves stood sharply defined just as he had always known them—the two solitary and striking figures that his fancy had invested with so pathetic an interest. Mentally he addressed Lord Musselburgh: 'Come and see them here—in the white light of day—and ask yourself whether you can believe in those midnight things you have heard of them. Look at this girl; you say yourself she is of extraordinary beauty; but is there not a still stranger fascination—is there not something that wins the heart to sympathy, and pity, and respect? Look at the pensive character of her mouth—look at the strange resignation in the beautiful eyes; perhaps her life has not been altogether too happy?—and is that to be brought as a charge against her? Then this old man—look at his proud bearing—look at the resolute set of his head—his straight glance—the courage of his firm mouth; has he the appearance, the demeanour, of a sharper, of a plausible and specious thief?' At this moment, at all events, it did not seem as if George Bethune's mind was set upon any swindling scheme. As he marched along, with head erect, and with eyes fixed absently on

the far horizon, he was reciting to himself, in sonorous tones, the metrical version of the Hundredth Psalm—

‘O enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.
For why? the Lord our God is good,
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.”

No doubt it was some reminiscence of his youthful days—perhaps a Saturday night’s task—that had lain dormant in his memory for sixty years or more.

The two young folk were mostly silent: they had plenty to think about—especially in view of Vincent’s departure on the morrow. As for him, his one consuming desire was to make sure of Maisrie, now that she had disclosed her heart to him; he wished for some closer bond, some securer tie, so that, whatever might happen, Maisrie should not be taken away from him. For he seemed to know as if by some inscrutable instinct that a crisis in his life was approaching. And it was not enough that her eyes had spoken; that she had given him the sandal-wood necklace; that she had striven with an almost pathetic humility to show her affection and esteem. He wished for some clearer assurance with regard to the future. Those people in the background who had pieced together that malignant story: were they not capable of further and more deadly mischief? He had affected to scorn them as mere idle and intermeddling fools; but they might become still more aggressive—enemies striking at him and at his heart’s desire from the dim phantom world that enshrouded them. Anyhow, he meant to act now, on his own discretion. Lord Musselburgh’s advice was no doubt worldly-wise enough and safe; but it was valueless in these present circumstances. Vincent felt that his life was his own, and that the moment had come when he must shape it towards a certain end—for good or ill, as the years might show.

After a pretty long walk along the cliffs, they returned to the town (on the Parade they met Sherry, who cheerfully informed them that he was on the point of starting for Monte Carlo, and hoped they would wish him good luck) and Vincent was easily persuaded by Maisrie to share their modest luncheon with them. Thereafter, when tobacco was produced, she begged to be excused for a little while, as she had some sewing

to do in her own room; and thus it was that Vincent, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, found himself presented with an opportunity of approaching the old man on the all-important theme. But on this occasion he was much more precise and urgent in his prayer; for he had thought the whole matter clearly out, through many a sleepless hour; and his plans lay fixed and definite before him.

"You yourself," he went on, "have often hinted that your future movements were uncertain—you might have to go away—and—and then I don't say that either Maisrie or I would forget—only I am afraid of absence. There appear to be certain people who don't wish you well; there might be more stories; who can tell what might not happen? Indeed," said he, regarding the old man a little anxiously, "I have been thinking that—that if Maisrie would consent—our getting married at once would be the safest and surest tie of all. I have not spoken of it to her—I thought I would put it before you first——"

Here he paused, in something of anxious uncertainty.

"Married at once?" George Bethune repeated, slowly. There was no expression of surprise or resentment; the old man waited calmly and courteously for further elucidation of these plans; his eyes were observant and attentive—but quite inscrutable.

"And I want to show you how I am situated," Vincent went on (but not knowing what to make of that perfectly impassive demeanour). "I hope there is no need to conceal anything—indeed, I should think you were pretty well acquainted with my circumstances by this time. You know my father is a rich man. I am his only son; and I suppose I shall inherit his fortune. I have a little money of my own—not much of an annual income, to be sure; and I have some friends who would help me if the worst came to the worst, but I don't see how that necessity should arise. For myself, I have unfortunately been brought up to no profession; I was trained for public life—for politics—if for anything; it has never been considered necessary that I should learn some method of making my own living. That is a misfortune—I can see that now; but at least I have been trying to do something of late; and I have got some encouragement; if there were any need, I fancy I could earn a modest income by writing for the newspapers. You have seen one or two of those articles—and I have been offered introductions, as you know. Well, now——"

And again he paused. All this had been more or less of plain sailing; now he was approaching a much more delicate matter.

"Well—the fact is—there has been some envious tittle-tattle—wretched stuff—not worth mentioning—except for this; that if I went to my father, and told him I wished to marry your granddaughter, he would be opposed to it. Yes, that is the truth. He does not know you; he has never seen Maisrie even; and of course he goes by what he hears—absolute folly as it is. However," Vincent continued, with some effort at cheerfulness (for he was glad to get away from that subject without being questioned), "the main point is this; if Maisrie and I were to get married, at once—as we have the right to do—we are surely of sufficient age—we know our own minds—I am quite certain my father would accept the whole affair good-naturedly and reasonably, and all would be well. Then see what it would be for Maisrie to have an assured position like that! She would be able to give up her share in the small income you once spoke of; that would be altogether yours; and surely you would be glad to know that her future was safe, whatever might happen. There would practically be no separation between you and her; it isn't as if she were moving into another sphere—among pretentious people; in fact, all the advantages are on her side; if we have plenty of money, she has birth, and name, and family; and then again, when Maisrie and I took up house for ourselves, there would be no more welcome guest than her grandfather. I think I can promise that."

There was silence for a moment—an ominous silence.

"Has Maisrie," said George Bethune, with slow and measured enunciation, and he regarded the young man from under his shaggy eyebrows, "has Maisrie intimated to you her wish for that—that arrangement?"

"No," said Vincent, eagerly. "How could she? I thought I was bound to speak to you first; for of course she will do nothing without your approval. But don't you think she has had enough of a wandering life—enough of precarious circumstances; and then if her heart says yes too——?"

Well, if this venerable impostor had at last succeeded in entrapping a rich man's son—in getting him to propose marriage to his granddaughter—he did not seem to be in a hurry to secure his prey.

"Maisrie has said nothing?" George Bethune asked again, in that curiously impassive fashion.

"No——"

"Has expressed no wish?"

"No—I have not spoken to her about this immediate proposal."

"Then, until she has," said the old man, calmly, "I must refuse any consent of mine. I think you have described the whole situation very fairly—clearly and honestly, as I imagine; but I do not see any reason for departing from what I said to you before, that I would rather my granddaughter was not bound by any formal tie or pledge—much less by such a marriage as you propose. For one thing, she may have a future before her that she little dreams of. Of course, if her happiness were involved, if she came to me and said that only by such and such an arrangement could her peace of mind be secured, then I might alter my views: at present I see no cause to do so. You are both young: if you care for each other, you should be content to wait. Years are a valuable test. After all, according to your own showing, you are dependent on your father's caprice: some angry objection on his part—and where would the fortunes of the young married couple be?"

But Vincent was too impetuous to be easily discouraged.

"Even then I should not be quite helpless," he urged. "And is my willingness to work to count for nothing? However, that is not the immediate question. Supposing Maisrie's happiness *were* concerned?—supposing she were a little tired of the uncertainty of her life?—supposing she were willing to trust herself to me—what then? Why, if she came to you, and admitted as much, I know you would consent. Is not that so?—I know it is so!—you would consent—for Maisrie's sake!"

The old man's eyes were turned away now—fixed on the slumbering coals in the grate.

"I had dreamed of other things," he said, almost to himself.

"Yes; but if Maisrie came to you?" Vincent said, with the same eagerness—almost, indeed, with some trace of joyous assurance—"She would not have long to plead, I think! And then again, at any moment, my circumstances might be so altered as to give you all the guarantee for the future which you seem to think necessary. A word from my father to-morrow might settle that: if I went to him, and could get him to understand what Maisrie really was. Or I might obtain some definite post: I have some good friends: I am going up to London to-morrow, and could begin to make inquiries. In the meantime," he added hastily—for he heard someone on the

stair—"do you object to my telling Maisrie what you have said?"

"What I have said? I dare say she knows," old George Bethune made answer, in an absent sort of way—and at this moment Maisrie entered the room, bringing her sewing with her, and further speech was impossible.

It was on this same afternoon that Lord Musselburgh carried along to his fair fiancée a report of the interview he had had with Vincent in the morning. The young widow was dreadfully alarmed.

"Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed, and she began to pace up and down the room in her agitation. "Marry the girl at once? Why, it is destruction? Fancy what all our plans and interests, all our lives, would be—with Vin cut out! It cannot be—it shall not be—it must be prevented at any cost! He would be dead—worse than dead—we should be pitying him always, and knowing where he was, and not able to go near him. You don't mean to say he is definitely resolved?" she demanded in her desperation.

"Indeed, there is no doubt about it—he spoke as plainly as you could wish," said Lord Musselburgh. "And he has argued the thing out; his head is clear enough, for all this wild infatuation of his. He sees that his father will not consent—beforehand; so he means to marry, and then hope for reconciliation when the whole affair is past praying for. That's the programme, you may depend on it."

"Harland must know at once," said Mrs. Ellison, going instantly to her writing-desk. "This must and shall be prevented. I am not going to have my boy's life ruined by a pack of begging-letter swindlers and cheats!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"AND HAST THOU PLAYED ME THIS!"

AND now in this time of urgency the appeal was to Maisrie herself; and how could he doubt what her answer would be; in spite of all those strange and inexplicable forebodings that seemed to haunt her mind?

But when he got up next morning he found to his dismay

that a sudden change in the weather was like to interfere in a very practical manner with his audacious plans. During the night the wind had backed to the south-west, accompanied by a sharp fall of the barometer; and now a stiff gale was blowing, and already a heavy sea was thundering in on the beach. There was as yet no rain, it is true; but along the southern horizon the louring heavens were even darker than the wind-driven waters; and an occasional shiver of white sunlight that swept across the waves spoke clearly enough of coming wet. Was it not altogether too wild and stormy a morning to hope that Maisrie would venture forth? And yet he was going away that day—with great uncertainty as to the time of his return; and how could he go without having some private speech with her? Nor was there any prospect of a lightening up of the weather outside; the gale seemed to be increasing in fury; and he ate his breakfast in silence, listening to the long dull roar and reverberation of the heavy-breaking surf.

Nevertheless here was a crisis; and something had to be done; so about half-past ten he went along to the lodging-house in German Place. The servant-maid greeted this handsome young man with an approving glance; and informed him that both Mr. and Miss Bethune were in the parlour upstairs.

"No, thank you," said he, in answer to this implied invitation, "I won't go up. I want to see Miss Bethune by herself: would you ask her if she would be so kind as to come downstairs for just a moment—I won't detain her——"

The girl divined the situation in an instant; and proved herself friendly. Without more ado she turned the handle of a door near her.

"Won't you step in there, sir?—the gentleman 'as gone out."

Vincent glanced into the little parlour. Here, indeed, was a refuge from the storm; but all the same he did not like to invade the privacy of a stranger's apartments.

"Oh, no, thanks," he said. "I will wait here, if Miss Bethune will be so kind as to come down for a minute. Will you ask her, please?"

The girl went upstairs; returned with the message that Miss Bethune would be down directly; then she disappeared, and Vincent was left alone in this little lobby. It was not a very picturesque place, to be sure, for an interview between two lovers: still, it would serve—especially if the friendly chambermaid were out of earshot, and if no prying landlady

should come along. The gale outside was so violent that all the doors and windows of the house were shaking and rattling: he could not ask Maisrie to face such a storm.

But in a second or so here was Maisrie herself, all ready apparelled—hat, muff, gloves, boa, and the furred collar of her jacket turned up.

"Why, Maisrie," he said, "you don't mean you are going out on such a morning—it is far too wild and stormy!——"

"That is of no consequence," she made answer, simply. "I have something to say to you, Vincent, before you go."

"And I have something to say to you, Maisrie. Still," he continued, with some little hesitation (for he was accustomed to take charge of her and guard her from the smallest harms), "I don't want you to get wet and blown about—"

"What does that matter?" she said: it was not of a shower of rain that she was thinking.

"Oh, very well," said he at last. "I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll fight our way down to the sea-front, and then go out to the end of the Chain Pier. There are some places of shelter out there; and there won't be a living soul anywhere about on such a morning. For I am going to ask you to make a promise, Maisrie," he added in a lower voice, "and the sea and the sky will be quite sufficient witnesses."

And truly this was fighting their way, as they discovered the moment they had left the house; for the gusts and squalls that came tearing along the street were like to choke them. She clung to his arm tightly; but her skirts were blown about her and impeded her; the two ends of her boa went flying away over her shoulders; while her hair was speedily in a most untoward state—though her companion thought it was always prettier that way than any other. Nevertheless they leant forward against the wind, and drove themselves through it, and eventually got down to the sea-front. Here, again, they were almost stunned by the terrific roar; for the tide was full up; and the huge, brown, concave, white-crested waves, thundering down on the shelving shingle, filled all the thick air with spray; while light balls of foam went sailing away inland, tossed hither and thither up into the purple-darkened sky. So far the driving squalls had brought no rain; but the atmosphere was surcharged with a salt moisture; more than once Vincent stopped for a second and took his handkerchief to dry Maisrie's lashes and eyebrows, and to push back from her forehead the fine wet threads of her glistening hair.

But soon they had got away from this roar of water and grinding pebbles, and were out on the pier, that was swaying sinuously before these fierce gusts, and that trembled to its foundations under each successive shock of the heavy surge. And now they could get a better view of the wide and hurrying sea—a sea of a tawny-brownish hue melting into a vivid green some way further out, and always and everywhere showing swift flashes of white, that seemed to gleam all the more suddenly and sharply where the weight of the purple skies darkened down to the horizon.

"What a shame it is," he said to her (perhaps with some affectation of cheerfulness, for she seemed curiously preoccupied), "What a shame it is to drag you out on such a morning!"

"I do not mind it," she made answer. "It will be something to remember."

When they reached the end of the pier, which was wholly deserted, he ensconced her snugly in a corner of one of the protected seats; and he was not far away from her when he sate down. Her lips had grown pale with the buffeting of the wind; the outside threads and plaits of her hair were damp and disordered; and her eyes were grave even to sadness; and yet never had the strange witchery of her youthful beauty so entirely entranced him. Perhaps it was the dim fear of losing her, that dwelt as a sort of shadow in his mind even when he was most buoyed up by the radiant confidence of four-and-twenty; perhaps it was the knowledge that, for a time at least, this was to be farewell; at all events he sate close to her, and held her hand tight, as though to make sure she should not be stolen away from him.

"Maisrie," said he, "do you know that I spoke to your grandfather yesterday?"

"Yes," she answered. "He told me."

"And what did he say?"

"At first," she said, with a bit of a sigh, "he talked of Balloray. I was sorry that came up again; he is happier when he does not think of it. And, indeed, I have noticed that of late he has almost given up speaking of the possibility of a great change in our condition. What chance is there of any such thing? We have no money to go to law, even if the law had not already decided against us. Then grandfather's idea that the estates might come to us through some accident, or series of accidents—what is that but a dream? I am sure he is far more content when he forgets what might have been; when

he trusts entirely to his own courage and self-reliance; when he is thinking, not of lost estates, but of some ballad he means to write about in the *Edinburgh Chronicle*. Poor grandfather!—and yet, who can help admiring his spirit—the very gaiety of his nature—in spite of all his misfortunes?”

“Yes, Maisrie—but—but what did he say about you?”

“About me?” the girl repeated. “Well, it was his usual kindness. He said I was only to think of what would tend to my own happiness. Happiness?” she went on, rather sadly. “As if this world was made for happiness!”

It was a strange speech for one so young—one who, so far as he could make out, had been so gently nurtured and cared for.

“What do you mean, Maisrie?” said he in his astonishment. “Why should you not have happiness, as well as another? Who can deserve it more than you—you who are so generous and well-wishing to everyone—”

“I would rather not speak of myself at all, Vincent,” she said. “That is nothing. I want to speak of you. I want you to consider—what is best for you. And I understand your position—perhaps more clearly than you imagine. You have made me think, of late, about many things; and now that you are going away, I must speak frankly. It will be difficult. Perhaps—perhaps, if you were more considerate, Vincent—?”

“Yes?” said he. That Maisrie should have to beg for consideration!

“There might be no need of speaking,” she went on, after that momentary pause. “If you were to go away now, and never see us any more, wouldn’t that be the simplest thing? There would be no misunderstanding—no ill-feeling of any kind. You would think of the time we knew you in London—and I’m sure I should always think of it—as a pleasant time: perhaps something too good to last. I have told you before: you must remember what your prospects are—what all your friends expect of you—and you will see that no good could come of hampering yourself—of introducing someone to your family who would only bring difficulty and trouble—”

“Yes, I understand!” he said—and he threw away her hand from him. “I understand now. But why not tell the truth at once—that you do not love me—as I had been fool enough to think you did!”

“Yes, perhaps I do not love you,” she said in a low voice.

"And yet I was not thinking of myself. I was trying to think of what was best for you—"

Her voice broke a little, and there were tears gathering on her eyelashes: seeing which made him instantly contrite. He caught her hand again.

"Maisrie, forgive me! I don't know why you should talk like that! If I have your love I do not fear anything that may happen in the future. There is nothing to fear. When I spoke to your grandfather yesterday afternoon, I told him precisely how I was situated; and I showed him that, granting there were some few little difficulties, the best way to meet them would be for you and me to get married at once: then everything would come right of its own accord—for one must credit one's relatives with a little common sense. Now that is my solution of all this trouble—oh, yes, I confess there has been a little trouble; but here is my solution of it—if you have courage, Maisrie. Maisrie, will you give me your promise—will you be my wife?"

She looked at him for a second; then lowered her eyes.

"Vincent," she said slowly, "you don't know what you ask. And I have wished that you would understand, without my having to speak. I have wished that you would understand—and go away—and make our friendship a memory, something to think over in after years. For how can I tell you clearly without seeming cruel and ungrateful to one who has through my whole life been kindness and goodness to me?—no!—no!"

She withdrew her hand; she turned away from him altogether.

"Maisrie," said he, "I don't want you to say anything, except that you love me, and will be my wife."

"Your wife, Vincent—your wife!" she exclaimed, in a piteous sort of way. "How can you ask any one to be your wife who has led the life that I have led? Can you not guess—Vincent—without my having to speak?"

He was astounded—but not alarmed: never had his faith in her flinched for a single instant.

"The life you have led?" said he, rather breathlessly; "Why—a—a beautiful life—an idyllic life—constant travel—and always treated with such kindness and care and affection—an ideal life—why, who would not envy you?"

She was sobbing—with her head averted.

"Don't, Vincent, don't! I cannot—I will not—tell you," she said, in a kind of despair. "What is the use? But it is

you who have made me think—it is you who have shown me clearly what I have been. I—I was young—I was only a child; my grandfather was everything to me; whatever he did was right. And now I have become a woman since I knew you—I can see myself—and I know that never, never can I be your wife.”

“Maisrie!”

But she paid no heed. She was strangely excited. She rose to her feet: and for a moment he thought he saw a look of her grandfather in her face.

“And yet even in my degradation—my degradation,” she said, repeating the words with cruel emphasis, “I have some pride. I know what your friends think of me: or I can guess. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps the stories you spoke of were all to be believed. That is neither here nor there now. But, at least, they need not be afraid that I am coming to them as a suppliant. I will not bring shame upon them; they have nothing to fear from me.”

He regarded her with astonishment, and with something of reproach also: these proud tones did not sound like Maisrie’s voice. And all of a sudden she changed.

“Why, Vincent, why,” she said, “should you put yourself in opposition to your friends? Why give up all the splendid future that is before you? Why disappoint all the hopes that have been formed of you——?”

“If need were, for the sake of your love, Maisrie,” he said.

“My love?” she said. “But you have that, Vincent—and—and you shall have that always!”

And here she burst into a passionate fit of weeping; and in vain he tried to soothe her. Nay, she would not have him speak.

“Let this be the last,” she said, through her bitter sobs. “Only—only, Vincent, don’t go away with any doubt about that in your mind. I love you!—I shall love you always!—I will give my life to thinking of you—when you are far too occupied—ever to think of me. Will you believe me, Vincent?—Will you believe, always, that I loved you—that I loved you too well to do what you ask—to become a drag on you—and a shame.” The tears were running down her cheeks; but she kept her eyes fixed bravely and piteously on him, as she uttered her wild, incoherent sentences. “My dearest—my dearest in all the world—will you remember—will you believe that always? Will you say to yourself, ‘Wherever Maisrie is at

this moment, she loves me—she is thinking of me.' Promise me, Vincent, that you will never doubt that! No—you need not put it into words: your heart tells you that it is true. And now, Vincent, kiss me!—kiss me, Vincent!—and then good-bye!"

She held up her face. He kissed her lips, that were salt with the sea-foam. The tangles of her wind-blown hair touched his cheek—and thrilled him.

He did not speak for a moment. He was overawed. This pure confession of a maiden soul had something sacred about it: how could he reply with commonplace phrases about his friends and the future? And yet, here was Maisrie on the point of departure; she only waited for a word of good-bye; and her eyes, that were now filled with a strange sadness and hopelessness, no longer regarded him. The farewell had been spoken—on her side.

"And you think I will let you go, after what you have just confessed?" he said to her—and his calm and restrained demeanour was a sort of answer to her trembling vehemence and her despair. "You give me the proudest possession a man may have on this earth: and I am to stand idly by, and let it be taken away from me. Is that a likely thing?"

He took her hand, and put her back into the sheltered corner.

"Sit down there, Maisrie, out of the wind. I want to talk to you. I was a fool when I mentioned those stories the other day: I could have cut my tongue out the next moment. And indeed I thought you took no notice. Why should you take any notice? Insensate trash! And who escapes such things?—and who is so childish as to heed them? Then again I remember your saying that I knew nothing about your grandfather or yourself. Do you think that is so? Do you think I have been all this time constantly in your society—watching you—studying you—yes, and studying you with the anxiety that goes with love—for, of course, you want the one you love to be perfect—do you imagine, after all this that I do not know you and understand you? Degradation!—very well, I accept that degradation: I welcome all the degradation that is likely to be associated with you. If I were to wash my hands in that sort of degradation, I think they would come out a little whiter! I know you to be as pure and noble as the purest and noblest woman alive; and what do I care about your—your circumstances?"

"Don't, Vincent!—don't be kind to me, Vincent!" she said, piteously. "It will be all the harder to think of when—when we are separated—and far away from each other."

"Yes, but we are not going to separate," said he briefly. "Your grandfather has left you to decide for yourself; and surely after what you have said to me this morning, surely I have the right to decide for you. I tell you, we are not going to separate, Maisrie—except for a few days. When I am up in London I mean to look round and see what dispositions can be made with regard to the future. Oh, I assure you I am going to be very prudent and circumspect; and I am ready to turn my hand to anything. Then, in another direction, Maisrie, you might give me a hint," he went on, with much cheerfulness, but watching her to see how she would take it. "What part of London do you think you would like best to live in? If we could get a small house with a garden up somewhere about Campden Hill—that would be pleasant; and of course there must be a library for your grandfather, for we should want the privacy of the morning-room for ourselves."

She shook her head.

"Dreams, Vincent, dreams!" she murmured.

"But sometimes dreams come true," said he, for he was not to be daunted. "And you will see how much dream-work there will be about it when I get things put into trim in London. Now I'm not going to keep you here any longer, Maisrie; for I fancy there is some rain coming across; and you mustn't be caught. I will go in and say good-bye to your grandfather, if I may; and the next you will hear of me will be when I send you some news from town. In the meantime, hearts up, Maisrie!—surely the granddaughter of your grandfather should show courage!"

When, that afternoon, Vincent arrived in London, he did not go to his temporary lodgings (what charm had the slummy little street in Mayfair for him now?) but to Grosvenor Place, where he shut himself up in his own room, and managed to get on somehow with that detested lecture. And next day he went down to Mendover; and next evening he made his appearance before the Mendover Liberal Association; and there were the customary votes of thanks to wind up the proceedings. There was nothing in all this worthy of note: what was of importance happened after, when the President of the Association, who had occupied the chair in the absence of Lord Musselburgh, accompanied Vincent home to the Red Lion. This Mr.

Simmons was a solicitor, and a great political power in Mendover; so, when he hinted that the Red Lion had a certain bin of port that was famous all over the county—and, indeed, was powerful enough to draw many a hunt-dinner to this hostelry by its own influence alone—be sure that Master Vin was not long in having a decanter of the wine placed on the table of the private parlour he had engaged. Mr. Simmons, who was a sharp, shrewd-looking little man, with a pale face and intensely black hair and short-cropped whiskers, suggested a cigar, and took the largest he could find in his host's case. Then he proceeded to make himself important and happy—with his toes on the fender, and his shoulders softly cushioned in an easy chair.

"Yes," said he, complacently, when the cigar was going well. "I think I can predict some good fortune for you, and that without having my hand crossed with a shilling. I hope I am breaking no confidence; we lawyers are supposed to be as mum as a priest after confessional; but of course what is said between gentlemen will go no further than the four walls of this room."

"I think you may trust me for that," Vincent said.

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Simmons, with an air of bland consequence. "I will say this at least—that in January you may fairly expect to be offered a very pretty New Year's present."

"Oh, really," said Vincent, without being much impressed: he fancied the Liberal Association were perhaps going to pass a vote of thanks—possibly inscribed on vellum—with the names of all the officials writ large.

"A very pretty present: the representation of Mendover."

But at this he pricked up his ears; and Mr. Simmons smiled.

"Mr. Richard Gosford is my client, as I think you know," the black-a-vised little lawyer went on, "but what I am telling you does not come direct from him to me. I need not particularise my sources of information. But from what I can gather I am almost certain that he means to resign at the end of the year—he did talk of waiting for the next General Election, as Lord Musselburgh may have told you; but his imaginary troubles have grown on him; and as far as I can see there will be nothing for you but to slip easily and quietly into his shoes next January. A very pretty New Year's present!"

"But of course there will be a contest!" Vincent exclaimed.

"Not a bit," Mr. Simmons made answer, regarding the blue curls of smoke from the cigar. "The snuggest little seat in England. Everybody knows you are Lord Musselburgh's nominee; and Lord Musselburgh has promised to do everything for our public park that Mr. Gosford ought to have done when he presented the ground. See? No bribery on your part. Simple as daylight. We'll run you in as if you were an infant on a wheelbarrow."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure," said Vincent. "Is there anything you would recommend me to do——?"

"Yes; I would recommend you to go and call on old Gosford to-morrow, before you leave for town."

"Wouldn't that look rather like undue haste in seizing a dead man's effects?" Vincent ventured to ask.

"A dead man?" said Mr. Simmons, helping himself to another glass of port. "He is neither dead nor dying, any more than you or I. And that's what you've got to remember to-morrow, when you go to see him. For goodness' sake, don't tell him he's looking well—as you've got to say to most invalids. Tell him he's looking very poorly. Be seriously concerned. Then he'll be off to bed again—and delighted. For what he suffers from is simply incurable laziness—and nervous timidity; and so long as he can hide himself under the blankets, and read books, he's happy."

"But what excuse am I to make for calling on him?" Vincent asked again.

"Oh," said Mr. Simmons, carelessly, "one public character visiting another. You were here delivering a lecture; and of course you called on the sitting member. You won't want any excuse if you will tell him he should take extraordinary care of himself in this changeable weather."

"And should I say anything about the seat?" Vincent asked further.

"I must leave that to your own discretion. Rather ticklish. Perhaps better say nothing—unless he introduces the subject: then you can talk about the overcrowding of the House, and the late hours, and the nervous wear and tear of London. But you needn't suggest to him, in set terms, that as he is retiring from business he might as well leave you the goodwill: perhaps that would be a little too outspoken."

As luck would have it, a day or two after Vin's return to town, Mr. Ogden came to dine at Grosvenor Place. It was a man's dinner—a dinner of political extremists and faddists

but so far from Master Vincent retiring to his own room and his books, as he sometimes did, he joined the party, and even stipulated for a place next the great electioneerer and wire-puller of the North. Further than that, he made himself most agreeable to Mr. Ogden: was most meek and humble and good-humoured (for to what deeps of hypocrisy will not a young man descend when he is madly in love?), and seemed to swallow wholesale the long-resounding list of reforms—Reforms Administrative, Reforms Electoral, Reforms Fiscal, Reforms Social and Political. For all the while he was saying within himself: 'My dear sir, perhaps what you say is quite true: and we're all going headlong to the devil—with the caucus for drag. And I could wish you to have a few more *h*'s: still, many excellent men have lived and died without them. The main point is this—if one might dare to ask—Is your Private Secretaryship still open; and, if so, what salary would you propose to give?' But, of course, he could not quite ask those questions at his own father's dinner-table; besides, he was in no hurry; he wanted a few more days to look round.

The guests of this evening did not go up to the drawing-room; they remained in the dining-room, smoking, until it was time for them to leave: then Harland Harris and his son found themselves alone together. Now the relations between father and son had been very considerably strained since the morning on which the former had brought his allegations against old George Bethune and his granddaughter; but on this occasion Vincent was in a particularly amiable and generous mood. He was pleased with himself for having paid court to Mr. Ogden; he looked forward with some natural gratification to this early chance of getting into Parliament; and, again, what was the use of attaching any importance to those preposterous charges? So he lit another cigarette; stretched out his legs before the fire; and told his father—but with certain reservations, for on one or two points he was pledged to silence—what had happened down at Mendover.

"I am heartily glad to hear it," said the communist-capitalist, with a certain cold severity of tone. "I am glad to hear that you begin to realise what are the serious interests of life. You are a very fortunate young man. If you are returned for Mendover, it will be by a concurrence of circumstances such as could not easily have been anticipated. At the same time I think it might be judicious if you went down again and hinted to Mr. — what did you say?—Simmons?—Mr.

Simmons that in the event of everything turning out well, there would be no need to wait for Lord Musselburgh's contribution towards the completion of the public park. What Lord Musselburgh is going to gain by that passes my comprehension. I can hardly suppose that he made such a promise in order to secure your election: that, indeed, would be a wild freak of generosity—so wild as to be incredible. However," continued Mr. Harris, in his pedantic and sententious manner, "it is unnecessary to seek for motives. We do not need to be indebted to him. I consider that it is of the greatest importance that you should enter Parliament at an early age; and I am willing to pay. Mendover ought to be a secure seat, if it is kept warm. Promise them what you like—I will see to the rest. There are other things besides a park, if they prefer to keep Lord Musselburgh to his promise: a free library, for example—if they have one already, another one; a clubhouse for the football club—a pavilion for the cricketers—a refreshment tent for the tennis ground—a band to play on the summer evenings—a number of things of that kind that you could discover from your friend the solicitor."

Vincent could have laughed, had he dared. Here he was invited to play the part of a great local magnate, plutocrat, and benefactor; and it was less than half-an-hour ago that he had been anxiously wondering whether £200 a year, or £250 a year, would be the probable salary of Mr. Ogden's private secretary. Harland Harris went on:

"It is so rarely that such an opportunity occurs—in England at least—that one must not be niggardly in welcoming it. Simmons—did you say Simmons? is clearly of importance: if you make him your agent in these negotiations, that will be enough for him—he will look after himself. And he will keep you safe: the elected member may steal a horse, whereas as a candidate he daren't look over the hedge. And once you are embarked on a career of public usefulness——"

"Bribery, do you mean?" said Vincent, meekly.

"I refer to the House of Commons; once you have your career open to you, you will be able to show whether the training you have undergone has been the right one, or whether the ordinary scholastic routine—mixed up with monkish traditions—would have been preferable. At all events you have seen the world. You have seen men, and their interests, and occupations: not a parcel of grown-up schoolboys playing games." And therewithal he bade his son good-night.

A day or two passed: Vincent was still making discreet inquiries as to how a young man, with some little knowledge of the world, and a trifle of capital at his back, but with no specific professional training, could best set to work to earn a moderate income for himself; and also he was sounding one or two editors for whom he had done some occasional work as to whether employment of a more permanent kind might be procurable. Moreover, he had ordered the little brooch for Maisrie—a tiny white dove this was, in mother-of-pearl, on a transverse narrow band of rubies; and besides that he had picked up a few things with which to make her room a little prettier, when she should return to town. Some of the latter, indeed, which were fit for immediate installation, he had already sent home; and one afternoon he thought he might as well go up and see what Mrs. Hobson had done with them.

It was the landlady's husband who opened the door; and even as he ushered the young man up to the parlour, he had begun his story, which was so confused and disconnected and inclined to tears that Vincent instantly suspected gin.

"Lor bless ye, sir, we ev bin in such a sad quandary, to be sure, and right glad I am to see you, sir, with them things a comin ome, and you was so particular about not a word to be said, and there was the missis, a angin of em up, and the beautiful counterpane, all spread out so neat and tidy, 'why,' says she, 'the Queen on the throne she aint got nothin more splendid, which he is the most generous young genelman, and jest as good as he's ansome'—beggin' your pardon, sir, for women will talk, and then in the middle of it hall, here comes the old genelman as we were not expecting of im, sir—ah, sir, a great man, a wonderful man, sir, in sorrowful sikkumstances—and the young lady, too, and hall to be settled up reglar—oh, heverythink, sir—like a genelman——"

"What the mischief are you talking about?" said Vincent, in his bewilderment. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune have been in London?"

"Yesterday, sir, yesterday, more's the pity, sir, to give up their rooms for good and hall, for never again shall we 'ev sich lodgers in this poor ouse. A honour, sir, as was least knowed when it was most appreciated, as one might say, sir, a man like that, sir, à great man, sir, though awaitin his time, like many others, and oldin is ead igh against fate and fortune whatever the world might say. And the young lady—beautiful she was;

as *you* know, sir—as *you* know, sir—and as good as gold—well, never again—in this poor ouse——”

“Look here,” said Vincent, impatiently—for this rigmarole threatened at any moment to dissolve in maudlin weeping, “will you answer me one question: am I to understand that Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter are not coming back here?”

“Indeed, no, sir, more’s the pity, sir, it was a honour to this pore ouse, and heverythink paid up like a genelman, though many’s the time I was sayin to the missis as she needn’t be so ard——”

“Where have they gone, then?” the younger man demanded, peremptorily.

“Lor bless ye, sir, it took me all of a suddent—they didn’t say nothin about that, sir—and I was that upset, sir——”

Vincent glanced at his watch: five minutes past four was the time.

“Oh, I see,” he said, with a fine carelessness (for there were wild and alarming suspicions darting through his brain). “They’re going to remain in Brighton, I dare say. Well, good-bye, Hobson! About those bits of things I sent up—you keep them for yourself—tell Mrs. Hobson I make her a present of them—you needn’t say anything about them to anybody.”

He left the house. He quickly crossed the street, and went up to his own rooms: the table there was a blank—he had almost expected as much. Then he went out again, hailed a hansom, drove down to Victoria-station, and caught the four-thirty train to Brighton. When he reached the lodging-house in German Place, he hardly dared knock: he seemed to know already what was meant by this hurried and stealthy departure. His worst fears were immediately confirmed. Mr. Bethune—Miss Bethune—had left the previous morning. And did no one know whither they had gone? No one. And there was no message—no letter—for any one who might call? There was no message—no letter.

The young man turned away. It was raining: he did not seem to care. Out there in the dark was the solitary light at the end of the pier: why, how many days had gone by since she had said to him, with tears running down her cheeks—“Vincent, I love you!—I love you!—you are my dearest in all the world!—remember that always!” And what was this that she had done?—for that it was of her doing he had no manner of doubt. Enough: his heart, that had many a time been

moved to pity by her solitariness, her friendlessness, had no more pity now. Pride rose in its place—pride, and reproach, and scorn. There was but the one indignant cry ringing in his ears—"False love—false love—and traitress!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN VAIN—IN VAIN.

ONE evening Mr. Courtney Fox, the London correspondent of the *Edinburgh Chronicle*, was as usual in his own room in the office in Fleet-street, when a card was brought to him.

"Show the gentleman up," said he to the boy.

A couple of seconds thereafter Vincent Harris made his appearance.

"Mr. Fox?" said he, inquiringly.

The heavy-built journalist did not rise to receive his visitor; he merely said—

"Take a chair. What can I do for you?"

"No, thanks," said Vincent, "I don't wish to detain you more than a moment. I only wanted to see if you could give me any information about Mr. George Bethune."

"Well, that would be only fair," said the big, ungainly man, with the small, keen blue eyes glinting behind spectacles; "that would be only a fair exchange, considering I remember how Mr. Bethune came down here one night and asked for information about you."

Vincent looked astonished.

"And I was able," continued Mr. Fox, "to give him all the information he cared for—namely, that you were the son of a very rich man. I presume that was all he wanted to know."

There was something in the tone of this speech—a familiarity bordering on insolence—that Vincent angrily resented; but he was wise enough to show nothing: his sole anxiety was to have news of Maisrie and her grandfather; this man's manner did not concern him much.

"I do not ask for information about Mr. Bethune himself; I dare say I know him as well as most do," said he with perfect calmness. "I only wish to know where he is."

"I don't know where he is," said the burly correspondent, examining the stranger with his small shrewd eyes, "but I guarantee that, wherever he is, he is living on the best. Shooting stags in Scotland most likely—".

"They don't shoot stags in December," said Vincent, briefly.

"Or careering down the Mediterranean in a yacht—gad, an auxiliary screw would come in handy for the old man," continued Mr. Fox, grinning at his own gay facetiousness; "anyhow, wherever he is, I'll bet he's enjoying himself and living on the fat of the land. Merry as a cricket—bawling away at his Scotch songs: I suppose that was how he amused himself when he was in Sing Sing—perhaps he learnt it there—"

"I thought you would probably know where he is," said Vincent, not paying much heed to these little jocosities, "if he happened to be sending in to you those articles on the Scotch ballads—"

"Articles on Scotch ballads!" said Mr. Fox, with a bit of a derisive laugh. "Yes, I know. A collation of the various versions: a cold collation, I should say, by the time he has got done with them. Why, my dear sir, have you never heard of Professor Childs, of Harvard College?"

"I have heard of Professor Child," said Vincent.

"Well, well, well, well, what is the difference?" said the ponderous correspondent, who rolled from side to side in his easy-chair as if he were in a bath, and peered with his minute, twinkling eyes. "And indeed it matters little to me what kind of rubbish is pitchforked into the *Weekly*. If my boss cares to do that kind of thing, for the sake of a 'brother Scot,' that's his own look-out. All I know is that not a scrap of the cold collation has come here, or has appeared in the *Weekly* as yet; so there is no clue that way to the whereabouts of old Father Christmas, old Santa Claus, the Wandering Scotch Jew—if that is what you want."

"I am sorry to have troubled you," said Vincent, with his hand on the door.

"Stop a bit," said Mr. Fox, in his blunt and rather impertinent fashion. "You and I might chance to be of use to each other some day. I like to know the young men in politics. If I can do you a good turn, you'll remember it; or rather you won't remember it, but I can recall it to you, when I want you to do me one. Take a seat. Let's make a compact. When you are in the House, you'll want the judicious little paragraph

sent through the provinces now and again: I can manage all that for you. Then you can give me an occasional tip: you're in ——'s confidence, people say—as much as any one can expect to be, that is. Won't you take a seat?—thanks, that will be better. I want to know you. I've already made one important acquaintanceship through your friend Mr. Bethune: it was quite an event when the great George Morris condescended to visit this humble office——”

“George Morris!” said Vincent.

“Perhaps you know him personally?” Mr. Fox said, and he went on in the most easy and affable fashion: “I may say without boasting that I am acquainted with most people—most people of any consequence: it is part of my business. But George Morris, somehow, I had never met. You may imagine, then, that when he came down here, to ask a few questions, I was precious glad to be of such service as I could; for I said to myself that here was just the man for me. Take a great scandal for example—they do happen sometimes, don't they?—even in this virtuous land of England: very well—I go to George Morris—a hint from him—and there I am first in the field: before the old mummies of the London press have had time to open their eyes and stare.”

Vincent had brought a chair from the side of the room, and was now seated: there was only the table, littered with telegrams and proofs, between those two.

“Did I understand you to say,” he asked, with his eyes fixed on this man, “that George Morris had come to you to make inquiries about Mr. Bethune?”

“You understood aright.”

“Who sent him?” demanded Vincent, abruptly—for there were strange fancies and still darker suspicions flying through his head.

But Courtney Fox smiled.

“George Morris, you may have heard, was not born yesterday. His business is to get out of you what he can, and to take care you get nothing out of him. It was not likely he would tell me why he came making these inquiries—even if I had cared to ask, which I did not.”

“You told him all you knew, of course, about Mr. Bethune?” Vincent went on, with a certain cold austerity.

“I did.”

“And how much more?”

“Ah, very good—very neat,” the spacious-waisted journalist

exclaimed with a noisy laugh. "Very good indeed. But look here, Mr. Harris, if the great solicitor was not born yesterday, you were—in a way; and so I venture to ask you why you should take such an interest in Mr. Bethune's affairs?"

Vincent answered him without flinching.

"Because, amongst other things, certain lies have been put in circulation about Mr. Bethune, and I wished to know where they arose. Now I am beginning to guess."

For an instant Mr. Courtnay Fox seemed somewhat disconcerted; but he betrayed no anger.

"Come, come," said he, with an affectation of good humour, "that is a strong word. Morris heard no lies from me, I can assure you. Why, don't we all of us know who and what old George Bethune is! He may flourish and vapour successfully enough elsewhere; but he doesn't impose on Fleet-street; we know him too well. And don't imagine I have any dislike towards your venerable friend; not the slightest; in fact, I rather admire the jovial old mountebank. You see, he doesn't treat me to too much of his Scotch *blague*; I'm not to the manner born; and he knows it. Oh, he's skilful enough in adapting himself to his surroundings—like a trout, that takes the colour of the pool he finds himself in; and when he gets hold of a Scotchman, I am told his acting of the rugged and manly independence of the Scot—of the Drury Lane Scot, I mean—is splendid. I wonder he doesn't go and live in Edinburgh. They take things seriously there. They might elevate him into a great position—make a great writer of him—they're in sore need of one or two; and then every now and again he could step out of his cloud of metaphysics, and fall on something. That's the way the Scotchmen get hold of a subject; they don't take it up as an ordinary Christian would; they fall on it. We once had an English poet called Milton; but Masson fell on him, and crushed him, and didn't even leave us an index by which to identify the remains. Old Bethune should go back to Scotland, and become the Grand Lama of Edinburgh letters: it would be a more dignified position than cadging about for a precarious living among us poor southrons."

Vincent paid but small heed to all this farrago: he was busily thinking how certain undoubted features and circumstances of old George Bethune's life might appear when viewed through the belittling and sardonic scepticism of this man's mind; and then again, having had that hue and shape conferred upon them, how would they look when presented to the

professional judgment of such a person as Mr. George Morris?

"The Scotch are the very oddest people in all the world," Mr. Fox continued, for he seemed to enjoy his own merry tirade. "They'll clasp a stranger to their bosom, and share their last bawbee with him, if only he can prove to them that he, too, was born within sight of MacGillicuddy's Reeks——"

"MacGillicuddy's Reeks are in Ireland," said Vincent.

"Well, MacGillicuddy's Breeks—no, that wont do; they don't wear such things in the north. Any unpronounceable place—any kind of puddle or barren rock: to be born within sight of that means that you own everything of honesty, and manliness, and worth that's going—yes, worth—worth is a sweet word—manly worth—it is the prerogative of persons who have secured the greatest blessing on earth, that of being born north of the Tweed. Now, why doesn't old George Bethune go away back there: and wave his tartan plaid, and stamp, and howl balderdash, and have monuments put up to him as the White-haired Bard of Glen-Toddy? That surely would be better than hawking bogus books about London and getting subscriptions for things that never appear; though he manages to do pretty well. Oh, yes, he does pretty well, one way and another. The cunning old cockroach—to take that girl around with him, and get her to make eyes at tradesmen, so as to swindle them out of pounds of tea!"

But at this a sudden flame seemed to go through the young man's brain—and unhappily he had his stick quite close by. In an instant he was on his feet, his right hand grasping the cane, his left fixed in the coat-collar of the luckless journalist, whose inert bulk he was attempting to drag from the chair.

"You vile hound!" Vincent said with set teeth—and his nostrils were dilated and his eyes afire, "I have allowed you to insult an old man—but now—now you have gone too far. Come out of that—and I will break every bone in your body——!"

Down came the stick; but by a fortunate accident it caught on the back of the chair, and the force of the blow sent it flying in two.

"For God's sake—stop!" the other cried—but in a terrified whisper—and his face was as white as death. "What are you doing!—are you mad!—I beg your pardon—can I do more? I beg your pardon—for God's sake have a little common sense!"

Vincent looked at the man : more abject cowardice he had never beheld than was displayed in every trembling limb of his huge carcase, in every feature of the blanched face. He flung him from him—in disdain.

“Yes,” said Mr. Fox, with a desperate effort at composure, and he even tried to put his coat collar to rights, though his fingers were all shaking, and himself panting and breathless. “You—you may thank me—for—for having saved you. If—I had touched that bell—if I had called out—you would have been ruined—ruined for life—a pretty story for —— to hear—about his favourite protégé—*increase your chances of getting into Parliament, wouldn’t it? Can’t you take a bit of a joke?—you’re not a Scotchman!*”

Vincent was still standing there, with lowering brow.

“When you are busy with your jokes,” said he, “I would advise you to keep any friends of mine out of them—especially a girl who has no one to defend her. But I am glad I came here to-night. I begin to understand in whose foul mind arose those distortions, and misrepresentations, and lies. So it was to you George Morris came when he wanted to know about Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter? An excellent authority! And it was straight from you, I suppose, that George Morris went to my father with his wonderful tale——”

“One moment,” said Courtnay Fox—and he appeared to speak with a little difficulty : perhaps he still felt the pressure of knuckles at his neck. “Sit down, I wish to explain. Mind you, I could make this a bad night’s work for you, if I chose. But I don’t, for reasons that you would understand if you were a little older and had to earn your own living, as I have. It is my interest to make friends——”

“And an elegant way you have of making them,” said Vincent scornfully.

“——and I want to assure you that I never said anything to George Morris about Mr. Bethune that was not quite well-known. Nor had I the least idea that Morris was going to your father; or that you had the least interest or concern in the matter. As for a bit of chaff about Scotland: who would mind that? Many a time I’ve had it out with Mr. Bethune himself in this very room; and do you suppose he cared?—his grandiloquent patriotism soared far away above my little Cockney jests. So I wish you to perceive that there was no enmity in the affair, no intention to do harm, and no misrepresentation; and when you see that, you will see also that

you have put yourself in the wrong, and I hope you will have the grace to apologise."

It was a most creditable effort to escape from a humiliating position with some semblance of dignity.

"Apologise for what?" said Vincent, staring.

"Why for your monstrous and outrageous conduct of this evening!"

—"I am to apologise?" said Vincent, with his brows growing dark again. "You introduce into your scurrilous talk the name of a young lady who is known to me—you speak of her in the most insulting and gratuitous fashion—and—and I am to apologise! Yes, I do apologise: I apologise for having brought such a fool of a stick with me: I hope it will be a heavier one if I hear you make use of such language again."

"Come, come, threats will not serve," said Mr. Fox—but he was clearly nervous and apprehensive. "Wouldn't it be better for you, now, to be a little civil—and—and I could promise to send you Mr. Bethune's address if I hear of it? Wouldn't that be better—and more reasonable? Yes, I will—I promise to send you his address if it comes in any way to this office—isn't that more reasonable?"

"I thank you," said Vincent, with formal politeness; and with an equally formal 'Good night' the young man took his leave. Mr. Courtney Fox instantly hid the broken portions of the cane (until he should have a chance of burning them), and, ringing the bell, called in a loud and manly voice for the latest telegrams.

So Vincent was once more thrown back on himself, and his own resources. During these past few days he had sought everywhere for the two lost ones; and sought in vain. First of all he had made sure they had left Brighton; then he had come to London; and morning, noon, and night had visited their accustomed haunts, without finding the least trace of them. He went from this restaurant to that; in the morning he walked about the Parks; he called at the libraries where they were known; no sign of them could be found anywhere. And now, when he thought of Maisrie, his heart was no longer angry and reproachful: nay, he grew to think it was in some wild mood of self-sacrifice that she had resolved to go away, and had persuaded her grandfather to take her. She had got some notion into her head that she was a degraded person; that his friends suspected her; that no future as between him and her was possible; that it was better they

should see each other no more. He remembered how she had drawn up her head in maidenly pride—in indignation, almost: his relatives might be at peace: they had nothing to fear from her. And here was the little brooch—with its tiny white dove, that was to rest on her bosom, as if bringing a message of love and safety—all ready for her; but her place was empty; she had gone from him, and perhaps for ever. The very waiters in the restaurants, when he went there all alone, ventured to express a little discreet surprise, and make enquiries: he could say nothing. He had the sandal-wood necklace, to be sure; and sometimes he wore it over his heart; and on the way home, through the dark thoroughfares, at times a faint touch of the perfume reached his nostrils—but there was no Maisrie by his side. And then again, a sudden marvellous vision would come before him: of Maisrie, her hair blown by the winds, her eyes piteous and full of tears, her eyebrows and lashes wet with the flying spray; and she would say ‘Kiss me, Vincent, kiss me!’, as if she had already resolved to go, and knew that this was to be a last, despairing farewell.

The days passed; and ever he continued his diligent search, for he knew that these two had but little money, and guessed that they had not departed on any far travel, especially at this time of the year. He went down to Scotland, and made enquiries among the Edinburgh newspaper offices—without avail. He advertised in several of the London daily journals: there was no reply. He told the head-waiter at the Restaurant Mentavisti, that if Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter—who were well-known to all in the place—should make their appearance any evening, and if he, the head-waiter, could manage to send some one to follow them home and ascertain their address, that would mean a couple of sovereigns in his pocket; but the opportunity never presented itself. And meanwhile this young man, taking no care of himself, and fretting from morning till evening, and often all the sleepless night through as well, was gradually losing his colour, and becoming like the ghost of his own natural self.

Christmas came. Harland Harris and Vincent went down to pass the holidays with Mrs. Ellison, at Brighton; and for the same purpose Lord Musselburgh returned to the Bedford Hotel. The four of them dined together on Christmas evening. It was not a very boisterous party, considering that the pragmatical and pedantic voice of the man of wealth was heard discoursing on such light and fanciful themes as the payment

of returning officers' expenses, the equalisation of the death duties, and the establishment of state-assisted intermediate schools; but Musselburgh threw in a little jest now and again, to mitigate the ponderosity of the harangue. Vincent was almost silent. Since coming down from London, he had not said a single word to any one of them about Mr. Bethune or his granddaughter: no doubt they would have told him—and perhaps rejoiced to tell him—that he had been betrayed. But Mrs. Ellison, sitting there, and watching more than listening, was concerned about the looks of her boy, as she called him; and before she left the table, she took up her glass, and said—

“I am going to ask you two gentlemen to drink a toast—and it is the health of the coming member for Mendover. And I'm going to ask him to pull himself together, and show some good spirits; for there's nothing a constituency likes so much as a merry and good-humoured candidate.”

It was clear moonlight that night: Vin's room faced the sea. Hour after hour he sate at the window, looking on the wide, grey plain and the faint blue-grey skies; and getting no good of either; for the far-searching doves of his thoughts came back to him without a twig of hope in their bill. The whole world seemed empty—and silent. He began to recall the time in which he used to think—or to fear—that some day a vast and solitary sea would come between Maisrie and himself; it was something he had dreamed or imagined; but this was altogether different now—this blank ignorance of where she might be was a far more terrible thing. He went over the different places he had heard her mention—Omaha, Chicago, Boston, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec: they only seemed to make the world the wider—to remove her further away from him, and interpose a veil between. She had vanished like a vision; and yet it was but the other day that he had found her clinging tight to his arm, her beautiful brown hair blown wet about her face, her eyes with love shining through her tears, her lips—when he kissed them—salt with the flying spray. And no longer—after that first and sudden outburst of indignant wrath—did he accuse her of any faithlessness or treachery: rather it was himself whom he reproached. Had he not promised, at the very moment when she had made her maiden confession to him, and spoken to him as a girl speaks once only in her life, had he not promised that always and always he would say to himself ‘Wherever Maisrie is—wherever she may be—she loves me, and is thinking of me?’ This

was the Mizpah set up between those two; and he had vowed his vow. What her going away might mean he could not tell; but at all events it was not permitted him to doubt—he dared not doubt—her love.

As for these repeated allegations that old George Bethune was nothing less than a mendicant impostor, what did that matter to him? Even if these charges could be substantiated, how was that to affect Maisrie or himself? No association could sully that pure soul. Perhaps it was the case that Mr. Bethune was not over-scrupulous and careful about money matters; many otherwise excellent persons had been of like habit. The band of private inquiry agents had amongst them discovered that the old man had allowed Vincent to pay the bill at the various restaurants they frequented. Well, that was true. Among the vague insinuations and assumptions that had been pieced together to form an indictment, here was one bit of solid fact. And what of it? Of what importance were those few trumpery shillings? It was of little moment which paid: here was an arrangement, become a habit, that had a certain convenience. And Vincent was proud to set against that, or against any conclusions that might be drawn from that, the incident of old George Bethune's stopping the poor woman in Hyde Park, and handing over to her all he possessed—sovereigns, shillings and pence—so that he did not even leave himself the wherewithal to buy a biscuit for his mid-day meal. Perhaps there were more sides to George Bethune's character than were likely to occur to the imagination of Messrs. Harland Harris, Morris, and Company?

The white moon sailed slowly over to the west; the house was still; the night outside silent; but there was no peace for him at all. If only he could get to see Maisrie—for the briefest moment—that he might demand the reason of her sudden flight! Was it some over-strung sensitiveness of spirit? Did she fear that no one would understand this carelessness of her grandfather about money-matters; and that she might be suspected of complicity, of acquiescence, in certain doubtful ways? Was that the cause of her strange sadness, her resignation, her hopelessness? Was that why she had spoken of her 'degradation'—why she had declared she could never be his wife—why she had begged him piteously to go away, and leave this bygone friendship to be a memory and nothing more? 'Can you not understand, Vincent!' she had said to him, in heart-breaking accents, as though she could not bring herself to the

brutality of plainer speech. Well, he understood this at all events: that in whatever circumstances Maisrie Bethune may have been placed, no contamination had touched *her*; white as the white moonlight out there was that pure soul; he had read her eyes.

The next morning Lord Musselburgh was out walking in the King's Road with the fair young widow who hoped soon to be re-transformed into a wife.

"That friend of yours down at Mendover," said she,—*"what is his name?—Gosford?—well, he seems an unconscionable time dying. I wish he'd hurry up with his Chiltern Hundreds and put an end to himself at once. That is what is wanted for Vin—the novelty and excitement of finding himself in the House of Commons. Supposing Mr. Gosford were to resign at once, how soon could Vin be returned? There's some procedure, isn't there?—the High Sheriff or somebody, issues a writ, or something——?"*

"I really cannot say," her companion answered blandly. "I belong to a sphere in which such violent convulsions are unknown."

"At all events, Parliament will meet about the middle of February?" she demanded.

"I presume so," was the careless answer.

"I wish the middle of February were here now, and Vin all securely returned," said she. "I suppose that even in the case of a small borough like Mendover, one's constituents can keep one pretty busy? They will watch how you vote, won't they?—and remonstrate when you go wrong; and pass resolutions; and expect you to go down and be cross-examined. Then there are always public meetings to be addressed; and petitions to be presented; and people wanting admission to the Speaker's Gallery——"

"Why, really, Madge, there's a sort of furious activity about you this morning," said he. "You quite take one's breath away. I shouldn't be surprised to see you on a platform yourself."

"It's all for Vin's sake I am so anxious," she exclaimed. "I can see how miserable and sad the poor boy is—though he bears it so bravely—never a word to one of us, lest we should ask him if he believes in those people now. I wonder if he can. I wonder if he was so blinded that even now he will shut his eyes to their true character?"

"They are quite gone away, then?" her companion asked.

"Oh, yes," she made answer. "I hope so. Indeed, I know they are. And on the whole it was opportune, just as this election was coming on; for now, if ever, Vin will have a chance of throwing off an infatuation that seemed likely to be his ruin, and of beginning that career of which we all hope such great things."

She glanced round, cautiously; and lowered her voice.

"But, oh, my goodness, if ever he should find out the means we took to persuade them to go, there will be the very mischief to pay; he will tear us to pieces! You know how impetuous and proud he is; and then those people have appealed to him in a curious way—their loneliness—their poverty—and their—— Yes, I will admit it—certain personal qualities and characteristics. I don't deny it; any more than I would deny that the girl was extremely pretty, and the old man picturesque, and even well-mannered and dignified in his way. All the more dangerous—the pair of them. Well, now they are gone, I breathe more freely. While they were here, no argument was of any avail. Vin looked into the girl's appealing face—and everything was refuted. And at all events we can say this to our own conscience—that we have done them no harm. We are not mediæval tyrants; we have not flung the venerable patriot and the innocent maiden into a dungeon, to say nothing of breaking their bones on a rack. The venerable patriot and the innocent maiden, I have no doubt, consider themselves remarkably well off. And that reminds me that Harland Harris, although he is of opinion that all property should be under social control——"

"Not all property, my dear Madge," said Lord Musselburgh, politely. "He would say that all property should be under social control—except his property."

"At all events, it seems to me that he occasionally finds it pretty convenient to have plenty of money at his own individual command. Why, for him to denounce the accumulation of capital," she continued, with a pretty scorn, "when no one makes more ostentatious use of the power of money! Is there a single thing he denies himself—one single thing that is only possible to him through his being a man of great wealth? I shouldn't wonder if, when he dies, he leaves instructions to have the electric light turned on into his coffin, just in case he should wake up and want to press the knob."

"Come, come, Madge," said Musselburgh. "Be generous.

A man cannot always practice what he preaches. You must grant him the privilege of sighing for an ideal."

"Harland Harris sighing for an ideal," said Mrs. Ellison, with something of feminine spite, "would make a capital subject for an imaginative picture by Watts—if my dear brother-in-law weren't rather stout, and wore a black frock-coat."

Meanwhile, Vincent returned to London, and renewed his solitary search; it was the only thing he felt fit for; all other employments had no meaning for him, were impossible. But, as day by day passed, he became more and more convinced that they must have left London: he knew their familiar haunts so well, and their habits, that he was certain he must have encountered them somewhere if they were still within the great city. And here was the New Year drawing nigh, when friends far separated recalled themselves to each other's memory, with hopes and good wishes for the coming time. It seemed to him that he would not have felt this loneliness so much, if only he had known that Maisrie was in this or that definite place—in Madrid—in Venice—in Rome—or even in some huge steamship ploughing its way across the wide Atlantic.

But a startling surprise was at hand. About half-past ten on the last night of the old year a note was brought upstairs to him by a servant. His face grew suddenly pale when he saw the handwriting, which he instantly recognised.

"Who brought this?" he said, breathlessly.

"A man, sir."

"Is he waiting?"

"No, sir; he said there was no answer."

"What sort of man?" asked Vincent, with the same rapidity—and not yet daring to open the letter.

"A—a common sort of man, sir."

"Very well—you needn't wait."

The moment that the servant had retired, Vincent tore open the envelope; and the first thing that he noticed, with a sudden sinking of the heart, was that there was no address at the head of the letter. It ran thus—the handwriting being a little tremulous here and there—

'DEAR VINCENT,

When you receive this, we shall be far away; but I have arranged that you shall get it just before the New Year, and it brings my heartfelt wishes for your happiness, as well as

the good-bye that I cannot say to you personally now. What I foresaw has come to pass; and it will be better for all of us, I think; though it is not with a very light heart that I write these few lines to you. Sometimes I wish that we had never met each other; and then again I should never have known all your kindness to me and to my grandfather, which will always be something to look back upon; and also the companionship we had for a time, which was so pleasant—you would understand how pleasant to me, if you had known what had gone before, and what is now likely to come after. But do not think I repine: more has been done for me than ever I can repay; and as I am the only one to whom my grandfather can look now for help and sympathy, I should be ungrateful indeed if I grudged it.

Forgive me, dear friend, if I speak so much of myself; my thoughts are far more often concerned about you than with anything that can happen to me. And I know that this step we are taking, though it may pain you for a little while, will be salutary in the end. You have a great future before you; your friends expect much of you; you owe it to yourself not to disappoint them. And after a little while, you will be able to go back to the places where we used to go; and there will be nothing but friendly recollections of pleasant evenings; and I am sure nothing need ever come between us (as you feared) I mean in the way of having kind thoughts of each other, always and always; and when you marry no one will more heartily wish you every happiness and blessing than I shall. This is to be my last letter to you; I have promised. I wish I could make it convey to you all I think; but you will understand, dear Vincent, that there is more in it than appears in these stiff and cold words. And another kindness I must beg of you, dear friend, before saying good-bye—and farewell—it is this, Would you try to forget a *little* of what I said to you that morning on the pier? If you thought anything I said was a little more than a girl should have confessed, would you try to forget it, dear Vincent? I was rather miserable—I foresaw we should have to say good-bye to each other, when you would not see it, for you were always so full of courage and confidence; and perhaps I told you more than I should have done—and you will try to forget that. I don't want you to forget it *all*, dear Vincent; only what you think was said too frankly—or hurriedly—at such a moment.

And now, dearest friend, this is good-bye; and it is good-

bye for ever, as between you and me. I will pray for your happiness always.

MAISRIE.

P.S.—There was one thing I said to you that you *promised* you would not forget.

M.'

Was he likely to forget it, or any single word she had uttered, on that wild, wind-tossed morning? But in the meantime the immediate question was—How and whence had this letter come? For one thing, it had been brought by hand; so there was no post-mark. Who, then, had been the messenger? How had he come to be employed? What might he not know of Maisrie's whereabouts? Was there a chance of finding a clue to Maisrie, after all, and just as the glad New Year was coming in?

It was barely eleven o'clock. He went down into the hall, whipped on overcoat and hat, and the next moment was striding away towards Mayfair; he judged, and judged rightly, that a boon companion and poet was not likely to be early abed on such a night. When he reached the lodging-house in the little thoroughfare off Park-street, he could hear singing going forward in the subterranean kitchen: nay, he could make out the raucous chorus—

*Says Wolsley, says he,
To Arabi,*

You can fight other chaps, but you can't fight me.

He rapped at the door; the landlady's daughter answered the summons; she showed him into a room, and then went below for her father. Presently Mr. Hobson appeared—quite creditably sober, considering the occasion.

"Did you bring a note down to me to-night, Hobson?" was the young man's first question.

"I did, sir."

His heart leapt up joyously, his swift surmise had been correct.

"And has Miss Bethune been here recently?" he asked, with the greatest eagerness.

"No, no, sir," said Hobson, shaking his head. "That was giv me when they was going away, and says she, 'Hobson,' says she, 'I can trust you; and there's never a word to be said

about this letter—not to hany [one whatever; and the night afore New Year's Day you'll take it down yourself, and leave it for Mr. Harris.' Which I did, sir; though not waitin,' as I thought there wasn't a ansver; and ope there's nothing wrong, sir."

Vincent was standing in the middle of the room—not listening.

"You have heard or seen nothing, then, of Mr. Bethune or of Miss Bethune, since they left?" he asked, absently.

"Nothing, sir—honly that I took notice of some advertisements, sir, in the papers—"

"I know about those," said Vincent.

So once more, as on many and many a recent occasion, his swiftly-blossoming hopes had been suddenly blighted; and there was nothing for him but to wander idly and pensively away back to Grosvenor Place. The New Year found him in his own room—with Maisrie's letter before him; while, with rather a careworn look on his face he studied every line and phrase of her last message to him.

But the New Year had something else in store for him besides that. He was returned, unopposed, for the borough of Mendover. And about the first thing that his constituents heard, after the election, was that their new member proposed to pay a visit to the United States and Canada, and that at present no date had been fixed for his coming back.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEYOND SEAS.

OUT here on the deck of this great White Star Liner—with the yellow waters of the Mersey lapping in the sunlight, and a brisk breeze blowing, and the curious excitement of departure thrilling through all the heterogeneous crowd of passengers—here something of hope came to him at last. This was better than haunting lonely restaurants, or walking through solitary streets; he seemed to know that Maisrie was no longer in the land he was leaving; she had fled away across the ocean—gone

back to the home, to some one of the various homes, of her childhood and girlhood. And although it appeared a mad thing that a young man should set out to explore so vast a continent in search of his lost love, it was not at all the impossible task it looked. He had made certain calculations. Newspaper offices are excellent centres of intelligence; and Scotch-American newspaper offices would still further limit the sphere of his inquiries. He had dreamed of a wide and sorrowful sea lying between him and her; but instead of that imaginary and impassable sea, why, there was only the familiar Atlantic, that nowadays you can cross in less than a week. And when he had found her, and seized her two hands fast, he would reproach her—oh, yes, he would reproach her—though perhaps there might be more of gladness than of anger in his tones. . . . ‘Ah, false love—traitress—coward heart—that ran away! What Quixotic self-sacrifice was it, then, that impelled you?—what fear of relatives?—what fire of wounded pride? No matter now: you are caught and held. You gave yourself to me; you cannot take yourself away again; nor shall any other. No more sudden disappearances—no more trembling notes of farewell—while I have you by the hand!’

The last good-byes had been called by the people crowded on the deck of the tender, the great ship was cautiously creeping down the stream, and the passengers, having done with the waving of handkerchiefs (and here and there a furtive drying of eyes) set about preparing for the voyage—securing their places at table, investigating their cabins, and getting their things unpacked. These occupations kept most of them in their state-rooms until close on dinner-time, so that they had not much chance of examining each other; but it is wonderful how rumour runs in a ship—especially if the Purser be a cheerful and communicative sort of person; and so it was that when all were assembled in the long and gorgeous saloon, two things had already become known; first, that the tall and handsome young Englishman who seemed to have no companion or acquaintance on board was the newly-elected member for Mendover; and second, that the extremely pretty woman who had the seat of honour at the Captain’s table was a Mrs. de Lara, a South American, as might have been guessed from her complexion, her eyes, and hair. It appeared to be a foregone conclusion that Mrs. de Lara was to be the belle of the ship on this voyage; such things are very soon settled; perhaps one or two of the commercial gentlemen may have crossed with her

before, and seen her exercise her sway. As for Vin Harris, his unopposed return for such an insignificant place as Mendover would not have secured much notice throughout the country had it not been that, immediately after the election, the great — had been kind enough to write to the new member a charming note of congratulation, which, of course, had to be published. It was a significant pat on the back, of which any young man might very well have been proud; and Mrs. Ellison bought innumerable copies of that morning's newspapers, and cut the letter out, and sent it round to her friends, lest they should not have seen it. Mr. Ogden was also so condescending as to send a similar message—but that was *not* published.

Now during the first evening on board ship, strangers mostly remain strangers to each other; but next morning things become different—especially if the weather be fine, and everyone is on deck. Small courtesies are tendered and accepted; people get introduced, or introduce each other, on the smallest pretence—except the old stagers, the wary ones, who hang aloof, in order to pick and choose. As for Vincent, he was well content with his own society, varied by an occasional chat with the Purser, when that ubiquitous official could spare a few moments. He was not anxious to make acquaintances. His thoughts were far ahead. He saw, not the thin, blue line of the Irish coast that actually was visible on the horizon—but the shallow waters at Sandy Hook, the broad bay, the long dusky belt of the city, with its innumerable spires jutting up into the white sky. He was wondering how long ago it was since Maisrie and her grandfather had crossed the Newfoundland Banks: it was a long start, but he would overtake them yet. Perhaps, when he was down in the big and busy town, making his inquiries from one newspaper-office to another, he might suddenly find himself face to face with the splendid old man, and the beautiful, pensive-eyed girl. . . . ‘Ah, Maisrie, you thought you would escape?—but I have you now—never to let you go again! And if you would rather not return to England—if your pride has been wounded—if you are indignant at what has been said or suspected of you and your grandfather—well, then, I will remain with you here! My love is more to me than my home: we will fight the world together—the three of us together: remaining here, if that pleases you better—only, no further thought of separation between you and me!’

On this brisk and bracing morning he was leaning idly with

his elbows on the rail, and looking towards the distant line of the Irish coast that was slowly becoming more definite in form, when Mr. Purser Collins came up to him.

"There's a very charming lady would like to make your acquaintance," said the officer. "Will you come with me, and I will introduce you?"

"Oh, very well," Vincent said, but with no great eagerness. "Tell me her name now that I may make sure of it."

"You are favoured—Mrs. de Lara."

"Oh, really," he said, indifferently. "She seems to me to have had half the men on the ship fetching and carrying for her all the morning."

And indeed, when he followed the Purser in order to be introduced to this lady, he found her pretty well surrounded by assiduous gentlemen; and 'if you please—if you please,' Mr. Collins had to keep repeating, before he could bring the new comer into the august presence. Mrs. de Lara—who, on closer inspection, turned out to be quite a young woman, with a pale, clear, olive complexion, softly-lustrous dark eyes that could say a good deal, a pretty smile and dimple, and magnificent hair—received him very graciously; and at once, and completely, and without the slightest compunction, proceeded to ignore the bystanders who had been so officiously kind to her. Of course their conversation was at first the usual nothings. Wonderful weather. Might be midsummer, but for the cold wind. Captain been on the bridge ever since Liverpool, poor man; get some rest after leaving Queenstown. Was she a good sailor?—Some ladies remained in their berths all the way over. Dry champagne, and plenty of it, the only safe-guard? Crossed many times? And so forth. But at length she said—

"Couldn't you find a chair, and bring it along?"

Now the assiduous gentlemen had managed to find a very snug corner for Mrs. de Lara, where there was just room for two deck chairs—her own and that of her companion and friend, Miss Martinez; and Vincent, being rather shy, had no intention of jamming himself into this nook. He made some little excuse—and remained standing with the others: whereupon Mrs. de Lara said to her companion—

"Isabel, will you go and see that the letters I left in my cabin are all properly stamped and put in the post-bag for Queenstown. Thank you, dear!"

Then, the moment her faithful friend was gone, she said, with something of a French manner—

"Here is a seat for you: come, tell me what the news of the ship is!"

Vincent could not very well refuse; though the result of her open preference and selection was that her other obsequious admirers fell away one by one, under some pretence of playing rope-quoits or shovel-board: so that, eventually, he and she were left alone together, for Miss Martinez did not return.

"Now," said the young grass-widow, whose very pretty chin was cushioned on abundant furs, "I am going to make you happy. But first of all I must tell you—you are in love."

"Oh, really?" said Vincent.

"Ah, yes, yes, yes," she said, with a charming insistence. "I have watched you. I know. You keep apart; you look far away; you speak to no one. And then I said to myself that I would make you happy. How? By asking you to tell me all about her."

Whereupon Vincent said to himself, 'You're a very impertinent woman—although you've got pretty eyes.' And again he said, 'But after all you *are* a woman; and perhaps from you I may learn something more about Maisrie.' So he said aloud—

"The deck of a steamer is hardly the place for secrets."

"Why not?" she protested. "Besides, it is no secret—to anyone with eyes. Come, tell me all about her—and be happy! I wish to interest you; I wish you to interest me; and so let us talk about the only thing that is worth talking about—that is, love. No, there are two things, perhaps—love, and money; but love is so full of surprises; it is the perpetual miracle that no one can understand; it is such a wonderful, unexpected, desperate kind of thing, that it will always be the most interesting. Now!"

"Well," said he—for there was something catching in the mad audacity of this young matron—"it must be secret for secret. My story for yours!"

She laughed long and heartily—until her merriment brought tears to her eyes.

"Why, I'm an old married woman!" she exclaimed. "Ah, I see what your bargain means. You only want to put me off. You think the time and place are not romantic enough; some night—out in mid-Atlantic—with perhaps a moon—and you'll be more communicative, when you forsake the smoking-room for half-an-hour, and send me a little message to meet you. Very well. Perhaps there are too many people tramping up

and down. Shall we have a tramp too? Sitting still so stiffens one. There—can you pull off the rugs, do you think? They've swathed me up like a mummy. Now give me your arm; and mind you don't let me go flying—I'm never steady on my feet for the first day or two."

Well, he found the grass-widow a most charming companion—bright, loquacious, and happy, until, indeed, they steamed into the entrance to Cork Harbour. Here, as most of the passengers were going on board the tender, for a scamper ashore, while the ship waited for the mails to arrive, Mrs. de Lara began to look a little wistful. All of a sudden it occurred to him that he ought, if only in common gratitude for her marked condescension, to ask her if she would care to go also.

"Oh—Mrs. de Lara," said he, "wouldn't you like to go ashore, and have a look round Queenstown?"

Her face lighted up in an instant; but there was a curious, amused expression in her eyes.

"I couldn't go alone with you, you know," said she.

"Why not?" said he.

She did not answer that question.

"If you like to ask Miss Martinez as well as myself," she continued, "I'm sure we should be delighted—and it would be very kind of you."

"Of course I will!" he said—and at once he went off in search of the needful companion. A few minutes thereafter the three of them were on board the tender, along with the rest of this crowd of eager, chattering passengers.

And a very pleasant visit it was they paid to the picturesque watering-place and its wide-stretching bay. First of all he took his two guests to a hotel, and gave them an excellent lunch, at which Mrs. de Lara made merry like an enfranchised schoolgirl; then he got an open carriage, and they were driven all about the place; and he bought them such fruit and flowers as he could find, until they were quite laden by the time they got back to the tender. They were in plenty of time; the mails were late. When they eventually returned on board the steamer, Vincent was on the whole very well pleased with that little excursion; only he hoped that the new acquaintanceship that had been formed had not been too conspicuously displayed, for people are given to talking during the *longueurs* of an Atlantic voyage.

And indeed it very soon appeared that after this little

adventure ashore Mrs. de Lara meant to claim him as her own. When she came on deck for the usual promenade before dinner, she sent for him (though there were plenty of gentlemen only too anxious to wait on her), and she took his arm during that perfunctory march up and down. Then she said to him—

“Would you think me very rude if I asked you to come and sit at our table? The fact is, I want somebody to be good to me, and to look after me; and the Captain, although he is a most delightful man when he happens to be there, is nearly always away, on duty, no doubt. I hate sitting next an empty chair—that throws me on to Miss Martinez, and she and I have exhausted all our subjects long ago. You’ve no particular friend, have you? Come to our table!”

“But I couldn’t think of turning anybody out!” he protested.

“Oh, that’s all right!” she made answer, cheerfully enough. “Miss Martinez will get a place somewhere else—Mr. Collins will arrange that—I dare say she will be rather pleased to be set free.”

And so it came to pass that at dinner Vincent found himself in the seat that had been vacated by the useful Isabel; and perhaps his promotion provoked a few underhand comments and significant glances at certain of the other tables, for very small trifles are noted on board ship. At all events he only knew that Mrs. de Lara was as engaging, and complaisant, and loquacious as ever; and that she talked away with very little regard as to who might overhear her. Nor was she any longer the merry, rattle-pated creature of the Queenstown hotel. Oh, no. Her conversation now was of a quite superior order. It was literary; and she had caught up plenty of the phrases of the rococo school; she could talk as well as another of environments, conditions, the principal note, style charged with colour, and the like. Nay, she ventured upon an epigram now and again—or, at least, something that sounded like an epigram. “England,” she said, “was a shop; France a stage; Germany a camp; and the United States a caucus.” And again she said, “There are three human beings whom I wish to meet with before I die: a pretty Frenchwoman, a modest American, and an honest Greek. But I am losing hope.” And then there was a tirade against affectation in writing. “Why should the man thrust himself upon me?” she demanded. “I don’t want to know him at all. I want him to report honestly and simply what he has seen of the world and

of human nature, and I am willing to be talked to, and I am willing to believe; but when he begins to posture and play tricks, then I become resentful. Why should he intrude his own personality at all?—he was never introduced to me; I have no wish for his acquaintance. So long as he expresses an honest opinion, good and well; I am willing to listen; but when he begins to interpose his clever little tricks and grimaces, then I say, ‘Get away, mountebank—and get a red-hot poker ready for pantaloons.’” And in this way she went on, whimsical, petulant, didactic by turns, to the stolid astonishment of a plethoric and red-faced old lady opposite, who contributed nothing to the conversation but an indigestion cough, and sate and stared, and doubtless had formed the opinion that any one who could talk in that fashion before a lot of strangers was no better than she should be.

But it was not of literature that Mrs. de Lara discoursed when Vincent returned that evening to the saloon, after having been in the smoking-room for about an hour, watching the commercials playing poker and getting up sweepstakes on the next day’s run. When she caught sight of him, she immediately rose and left the group of newly-formed acquaintances with whom she had been sitting—in the neighbourhood of the piano—and deliberately came along and met him half-way.

“Let us remain here,” said she; “and then if we talk we shan’t interfere with the music.”

She lay back in her chair as if waiting for him to begin; he was thinking how well her costume became her—her dress of black silk touched here and there with yellow satin—the sharp scarlet stroke of her fan—the small crescent of diamonds in her jet-black hair. Then the softened lamplight seemed to lend depth and lustre to her dark eyes; and gave something of warmth, too, to the pale and clear complexion. She had crossed her feet; her fan lay idle in her lap; she regarded him from under those long, out-curving lashes.

“They cannot hear you,” she said—perhaps thinking that he was silent out of politeness to the innocent young damsels who were doing their best at the piano—“and you cannot hear them, which is also fortunate. Music is either divine—or intolerable; what they are doing is not divine; I have been listening. But good music—ah, well, it is not to be spoken of. Only this; isn’t it strange that the two things that can preserve longest for you associations with some one you have been fond of are music and scent? Not painting—not any portrait; not

poetry—not anything you have read, or may read : but music and scent. You will discover that some day.”

He laughed.

“How curiously you talk ! I dare say I am older than you—though that is not saying much.”

“But I have seen the world,” said she, with a smile, almost of sadness.

“Not half of what I have seen of it, I’ll answer for that.”

“Oh, but you,” she continued, regarding him with much favour and kindness, “you are an *ingénu*—you have the frank English character—you would believe a good deal—in any one you cared for, I mean.”

“I suppose I should,” he said, simply enough. “I hope so.”

“But as I say,” she resumed, “the two things that preserve associations the longest—and are apt to spring on you suddenly—are music and scent. You may have forgotten in every other direction ; oh, yes, forgetting is very easy, as you will find out ; for ‘constancy lives in realms above,’ and not here upon earth at all : well, when you have forgotten the one you were fond of, and cannot remember, and perhaps do not care to remember all that happened at that too blissful period of life—then, on some occasion or another there chances to come a fragment of a song, or a whiff of scent, and behold ! all that bygone time is before you again, and you tremble, you are bewildered ! Oh, I assure you,” she went on, with a very charming smile, “it is not at all a pleasant experience. You think you had buried all that past time, and hidden away the ghosts ; you are beginning to feel pretty comfortable and content with all existing circumstances ; and then—a few notes of a violin—a passing touch of perfume—and your heart jumps up as if it had been shot through with a rifle-ball. What is your favourite scent ?” she asked, somewhat abruptly.

“Sandal-wood,” said he (for surely that was revealing no secret ?)

“Then she wore a string of sandal-wood beads,” said Mrs de Lara, with a quick look.

He was silent.

“And perhaps she gave them to you as a keepsake ?” was the next question.

Here, indeed, he was startled ; and she noticed it ; and laughed a little.

“No, I am not a witch,” she said. “All that has happened before now : do you think you are the first ? Why, I am sure,

now, you've worn those beads next your heart, in the daytime, and made yourself very uncomfortable; yes, and you've tried wearing them at night, and couldn't sleep because they hurt you. Never mind, I will tell you what to do: get them made into a watch chain, with small gold links connecting the beads; and when you wear it with evening dress, every woman will recognise it as a love-gift—every one of them will say 'A girl gave him that.'"

"Perhaps I might not wish to make a display of it," said Vincent.

"Then you're in the first stage of inconstancy," said she, promptly. "If you're not madly anxious that the whole world should know you have won her favour, then you've taken the first step on the downward road to indifference; you are regarding certain things as bygone, and your eyes are beginning to rove elsewhere. Well, why not? It's the way of the world. It's human nature. At the same time I want to hear some more about the young lady of the sandal-wood necklace."

"I have told you more than I intended," he answered her.

"You haven't told me anything: I guessed for myself."

"Well, now, I am going to ask your advice," said he—for how could he tell but that this bright, alert, intrepid person, with her varied experience of the world, might be able to help him? She was far different from Maisrie, to be sure; different as night from day; but still she was a woman; and she might perhaps be able to interpret a nature wholly alien from her own.

So she sate mute and attentive, and watching every expression of his face, while he put before her a set of imaginary circumstances. It was not his own story; but just so much of it as might enable her to give him counsel. And he had hardly finished when she said—

"You don't know where to find her; and yet you have never thought of a means of bringing her to you at once?"

"What means?" said he.

"Why, it is so simple!" she exclaimed. "Have you no invention? But I will tell you, then. As soon you land in New York, get yourself knocked over by a tram-car. The accident to the rich young Englishman who has just arrived in America will be in all the papers, and will lose nothing in the telling. Your father's name is known; you have recently been elected a member of Parliament; they will make the most of the story—and of course you needn't say your life is *not* in

danger. Then on the wings of love the fair one comes flying; flops down by the side of your bed, in tears; perhaps she would even consent to a marriage—if you were looking dreadfully pale; then you could get well again in double quick time—and live happy ever after.”

She was still watching him from under her long, indolent lashes; and of a sudden she changed her tone.

“Are you vexed? You find me not sympathetic? Perhaps I am not. Perhaps I am a little incredulous. You have told me very little; but I surmise; and when a young lady remains away from her lover, and does not wish it to be known where she is, then I confess I grow suspicious. Instead of ‘Seek the woman,’ it is ‘Find the man’—oh, I mean in most cases—I mean in most cases—not in all—you must not misunderstand me!”

“In this case you are mistaken, then,” said Vincent briefly.

Indeed the gay young grass-widow found that she could not get very far into Vincent’s confidence in this matter; and when she indulged in a little pleasantry, he grew reserved and showed a disposition to withdraw; whereupon she thought it better to give up the subject altogether. But she did not give him up; on the contrary, she took possession of him more completely than ever; and made no secret of the favour she bestowed on him. For example, there was an amateur photographer on board; and one morning (everybody knew everybody else by this time) he came up to Mrs. de Lara, who was seated in her deck-chair, with a little band of devoted slaves and admirers surrounding her.

“Mrs. de Lara,” said he, “I have taken nearly everybody on board except you. Aren’t you going to give me a chance?”

“Oh, yes,” said she. “Yes, certainly.” Then she looked round, and added, in the most natural way in the world—“But where is Mr. Harris?”

“He’s in the saloon writing letters—I saw him there a minute ago,” said one of the bystanders.

“Won’t somebody go and fetch him?” she continued. “We ought to be all in—if Mr. Searle can manage it.”

Accordingly Vincent was summoned from below, and forthwith made his appearance.

“You come and sit by me, Mr. Harris,” said the young matron. “It would look absurd to have one sitting and all the others standing.”

“Oh, no—this will do,” said Vincent, seating himself on a

signal-cannon that was close to the rail, while he steadied himself by putting a hand on the shrouds.

"Not at all," she protested, with a certain imperious wilfulness. "You're too far over; you'll be out of the picture altogether. There is Isabel's chair over there: fetch that."

And, of course, he had to do as he was bid; though it was rather a conspicuous position to assume. Then, when that negative was taken, she would have the grouping altered; Vincent had to stand by her side, with his arm on her chair; again he had to seat himself on the deck at her feet; whatever suggestions were made by the artist, she managed somehow that she and Vincent should be together. And when next day, the bronze-brown proofs were handed about, they were very much admired—except, perhaps, by the lady-passengers, who could not understand why Mrs. de Lara should pose as the only woman on board the steamer.

But it was not Mrs. de Lara who was in his thoughts when, early one morning, he found himself on the upper deck, just under the bridge, with his eyes fixed on a far strip of land that lay along the western horizon. Not a thin sharp line of blue, but a low-lying bulky mass of pale neutral tint; and there were faint yellow mists hanging about it, and also covering the smooth, long-undulating surface of the sea. However, the sunrise was now declared; this almost impalpable fog would soon be dispersed; and the great continent behind that out-lying coast would gradually awaken to the splendour of the new day. And in what part of its vast extent was Maisrie now awaiting him?—no, not awaiting him, but perhaps thinking of him, and little dreaming he was so near?

They cautiously steamed over the shallow waters at Sandy Hook; they sailed up the wide bay; momentarily the long flat line of New York, with its towering buildings and steeples jutting up here and there, was drawing nigh. Mrs. de Lara, rather wistfully, asked him whether she was ever likely to see him again; he answered that he did not know how soon he might have to leave New York; but, if she would be so kind as to give him her address, he would try to call before he went. She handed him her card; said something about the pleasant voyage they had had; and then went away to see that Isabel had not neglected anything in her packing.

They slowed into the wharf; the luggage was got ashore and examined—in this universal scrimmage he lost sight of Mrs. de Lara and her faithful companion; and by and by he was being

jolted and pitched and flung about in the coach that was carrying him to the hotel he had chosen. With an eager curiosity he kept watching the passers-by on the side-walk, searching for a face that was nowhere to be seen. He had heard and known of many strange coincidences: it would only be another one—if a glad and wonderful one—were he to find Maisrie on the very first day of his arrival in America.

As soon as he had got established in his hotel, and seen that his luggage had been brought up, he went out again and made away for the neighbourhood of Printing House Square. It needs hardly be said that the *Western Scotsman* was not in possession of a vast white marble building, with huge golden letters shining in the afternoon sun; all the same he had little difficulty in finding the small and unpretentious office; and his first inquiry was for Mr. Anstruther. Mr. Anstruther had been there in the morning; but had gone away home, not feeling very well. Where did he live?—over in Brooklyn. But he would be at the office the next day? Oh, yes; almost certainly; it was nothing but a rather bad cold; and as they went to press on the following evening, he would be pretty sure to be at the office in the morning.

Then Vincent hesitated. This clerk seemed a civil-spoken kind of young fellow.

“Do you happen to know if—if a Mr. Bethune has called at this office of late?”

“Bethune?—not that I am aware of,” was the answer.

“He is a friend of Mr. Anstruther’s,” Vincent went on, led by a vague hope, “an old gentleman with white hair and beard—a handsome old man. There would be a young lady with him most probably.”

“No, sir; I have not seen any one of that description,” said the clerk. “But he might have called on Mr. Anstruther at his home.”

“Oh, yes, certainly—very likely,” said Vincent. “Thank you. I will come along to-morrow morning, and hope to find Mr. Anstruther quite well again.”

So he left and went out into the gathering dusk of the afternoon; and as he had nothing to do now, he walked all the way back to his hotel, looking at the various changes that had taken place since last he had been in the busy city. And then, when he reached the sumptuous and heavily-decorated apartment that served him at once as sitting-room and bedroom, he set to work to put his things in order, for they had

been rather hurriedly jammed into his portmanteau on board ship.

He was thus engaged when there came a knock at the door.

"Entrez!" he called out, inadvertently (with some dim feeling that he was in a foreign town.)

The stranger needed no second invitation. He presented himself. He was a small man, with a sallow and bloodless face, a black beard closely trimmed, a moustache allowed to grow its natural length, and dark, opaque, impassive eyes. He was rather showily dressed, and wore a *pince-nez*.

For a second he paused at the door to take out his card-case; then, without uttering a word, he stepped forward and placed his card on the table. Vincent was rather surprised at this form of introduction; but of course he took up the card. He read thereon: '*Mr. Joseph de Lara.*'

"Oh, really," said he (but what passed through his mind was—'Is that confounded woman going to persecute me on shore as well as at sea?'). "How do you do? Very glad to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, indeed, are you?" the other said, with a peculiar accent, the like of which Vincent had never heard before. "Perhaps not, when you know why I am here. Ah, do not pretend!—do not pretend!"

Vincent stared at him, as if this were some escaped lunatic with whom he had to deal.

"Sir, I am here to call you to account," said the little foreigner, in his thick voice. "It has been the scandal of the whole ship—the talk of all the voyage over—and it is an insult to me—to me—that my wife should be spoken of. Yes, you must make compensation—I demand compensation—and how? By the only way that is known to an Englishman. An Englishman feels only in his pocket; if he does wrong, he must pay; I demand from you a sum that I expend in charity——"

Vincent who saw what all this meant in a moment, burst out laughing—a little scornfully.

"You've come to the wrong shop, my good friend!" said he.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" the little dark man exclaimed, with an affectation of rising wrath: "Look at this—I tell you, look at this!" He drew from his pocket one of the photographs which had been taken on board the steamer, and smacked it with the back of his hand. "Do you see that?—the scandal of the whole voyage! My wife compromised—the whole ship talking—you think you are to get off for

nothing? No! No! you do not! The only punishment that can reach you is the punishment of the pocket—you must pay.”

“Oh, don’t make a fool of yourself!” said Vincent, with angry contempt. “I’ve met members of your profession before. But this is too thin.”

“Oh—too thin? You shall find out!” the other said, vindictively—and yet the black and beady eyes behind the *pince-nez* were impassive and watchful. “There, on the other side of my card, is my address. You can think over it. Perhaps I shall see you to-morrow. If I do not—if you do not come there to give the compensation I demand, I will make this country too hot to hold you—yes, very much too hot, as you shall discover. I will make you sorry—I will make you sorry—you shall see——”

He went on vapouring in this fashion for some little time longer, affecting all the while to become more and more indignant; but at length Vincent, growing tired, walked to the door and opened it.

“This is the way out,” he said curtly.

Mr. de Lara took the hint with a dignified equanimity.

“You have my address,” he said, as he passed into the corridor; “I do not wish to do anything disagreeable—unless I am compelled. You will think over it; and I shall see you to-morrow, I hope. I wish to be friendly—it will be for your interest, too. Good-night!”

Vincent shut the door and went and sate down, the better to consider. Not that he was in the least perturbed by this man’s ridiculous threats; what puzzled him—and frightened him almost—was the possible connection of the charming and fascinating Mrs. de Lara with this barefaced attempt at blackmail. But no; he could not, he would not believe it! He recalled her pretty ways, her frankness, her engaging manner, her good humour, her clever, wayward talk, her kindness towards himself; and he could not bring himself to think that all the time she had been planning a paltry and despicable conspiracy to extort money, or even that she would lend herself to such a scheme at the instigation of her scapegrace husband. However, his speculations on these points were now interrupted by the arrival of the dinner-hour; and he went below to the table d’hôte.

During dinner he thought that a little later on in the evening he would go along to Lexington Avenue, and call on a lawyer whose acquaintance he had made on a former visit to

New York. He might by chance be at home and disengaged; and an apology could be made for disturbing him at such an unusual hour. And this, accordingly, Vincent did; found that Mr. Griswold was in the house; was shown into the study; and presently the lawyer—a tall, thin man, with a cadaverous and deeply-lined face and cold grey eyes—came in and received his unexpected visitor politely enough.

“De Lara?” said he, when Vincent had told his story. “Well, yes, I know something of De Lara. And a very disagreeable fellow he is to have any dealings with.”

“But I don’t want to have any dealings with him,” Vincent protested, “and I don’t see how there should be any necessity. The whole thing is a preposterous attempt at extortion. If only he were to put down on paper what he said to me this evening, I would show him something—or at least I should do so if he and I were in England.”

“He is not so foolish,” the lawyer said. “Well, what do you propose to do?—compromise for the sake of peace and quietness?”

“Certainly not,” was the instant reply.

“He’s a mischievous devil,” said Mr. Griswold, doubtfully. “And of course you don’t want to have things said about you in newspapers, however obscure. Might get sent over to England. Yes, he’s a mischievous devil when he turns ugly. What do you say now?—for the sake of peace and quietness—a little matter of a couple of hundred dollars—and nobody need know anything about it——”

“Give a couple of hundred dollars to that infernal scoundrel?—I will see him d——d first!” said Vincent, with a decision that was unmistakeable.

“There’s no reason why you should give him a cent—not the slightest,” the lawyer went on. “But some people do, to save trouble. However, you will not be remaining long in this city; I see it announced that you are going on a tour through the United States and Canada.”

“The fact is, Mr. Griswold,” said Vincent, “I came along—at this unholy hour, for which I hope you will forgive me—not to ask you what I should do about that fellow’s threats—I don’t value them a pin’s point—but merely to see if you knew anything about those two——”

“The De Lara’s?”

“Yes, what does he do, to begin with? What’s his occupation—his business?”

"Nominally," said Mr. Griswold, "he belongs to my own profession; but I fancy he is more mixed up with some low-class newspapers. I have heard, indeed, that one of his sources of income is levying black-mail on actresses. The poor girls lose nerve, you understand: they won't fight; they would rather 'see' him, as the phrase is, than incur his enmity."

"Well, then, what I want to know still more particularly," the young man proceeded, "is this: is Mrs. de Lara supposed to take part in these pretty little plans for obtaining money?"

The lawyer smiled.

"You ought to know her better than I do; in fact, I don't know her at all."

Vincent was silent for a second.

"No; I should not have imagined it of her. It seems incredible. But if you don't know her personally, perhaps you know what is thought of her? What is her general reputation?"

"Her reputation? I can hardly answer that question. I should say," Mr. Griswold went on, in his slow and deliberate manner, "that there is a kind of—a kind of impression—that, so long as the money was forthcoming, Mrs. de Lara would not be too anxious to inquire where it came from."

"She was at the Captain's table!" Vincent exclaimed.

"Ship captains don't know much about what is going on on shore," was the reply. "Besides, if Mrs. de Lara wanted to sit at the Captain's table, it's at the Captain's table you would find her, and that without much delay! In any case why are you so anxious to find out about Mrs. de Lara's peculiarities—apart from her being a very pretty woman?"

"Oh," said Vincent, as he rose to apologise once more for this intrusion, and to say good-night, "one is always meeting with new experiences. Another lesson in the ways of the world, I suppose."

But all the same, as he walked slowly and thoughtfully back to his hotel, he kept saying to himself that he would rather not believe that Mrs. de Lara had betrayed him and was an accomplice in this shameless attempt to make money out of him. Nay, he said to himself that he would refuse to believe until he was forced to believe: though he did not go a step further, and proceed to ask himself the why and wherefore of this curious reluctance.

CHAPTER XX.

WEST AND EAST.

WHEN Vincent went along the next morning to the office of the *Western Scotsman*, he was at once shown into the editorial room, and there he found before him a short, thick-set man with a leonine profusion of light chestnut hair thrown back from a lofty forehead, somewhat irregular features, and clear blue eyes that had at present something of a cold scrutiny in them. To any one else, the editor of the *Western Scotsman* might have appeared a somewhat commonplace-looking person; but to Vincent he was far from commonplace. Here was one who had befriended the two world-wanderers; who had known them in the bygone years; perhaps Maisrie herself had sat, in this very room, patiently waiting, while the two men talked. And yet when he asked for news of old George Bethune and his granddaughter, Mr. Anstruther's manner was unaccountably reserved.

"No," said he, "I know nothing of them, nothing whatever; but I can well understand that George Bethune might be in New York, or might have passed through New York, without calling on me."

"Why?" said Vincent in surprise.

"Oh, well," said the Editor, with some touch of asperity and even of indignation, "I should like to believe the best of an old friend; and certainly George Bethune always seemed to me a loyal Scot—proud of his country—proud of the name he bears, as well he might; but when you find him trying to filch the idea of a book—from a fellow-countryman, too—and making use of the letter of introduction I gave him to Lord Musselburgh to get money——"

"But that can all be explained," said Vincent, eagerly—and he even forgot his immediate disappointment in his desire to clear away those imputations from Maisrie's grandfather. "The money was repaid to Lord Musselburgh as soon as it was found that the American book was coming out; I know it was—I am certain of it; and when the volume did come out, no one was so anxious to welcome it, and give it a helping hand, as Mr. Bethune himself. He wrote the review in the *Edinburgh Chronicle*——"

"Oh, did he?" said the Editor, with some slight alteration in his tone. "I am glad of that. I could see it was written by some one with ample knowledge: in fact, I quoted the article in the *Scotsman*, it seemed to me so well done. Yes, I am glad of that," Mr. Anstruther repeated.

"And then," continued Vincent, "the old man may easily have persuaded himself that, being familiar with the subject, he was entitled to publish a volume on the other side of the water. But I know this, that what he desired above all was that honour should be done to those Scotchmen who had written about their affection for their native country while living in other lands, and that the people at home should know those widely-scattered poets; and when he found that this work had already been undertaken, and was actually coming out, there was no jealousy in his mind—not the slightest—he was only anxious that the book should be known everywhere, but especially in Scotland."

"I can assure you I am very glad to hear it," said Mr. Anstruther, who was clearly much mollified by this vague but earnest vindication. "And I may say that when some one came here making inquiries about George Bethune, I did not put matters in their worst light——"

"Oh, some one has been here making inquiries?" said Vincent, quickly.

"About a month ago, or more."

"Who was it?"

"I forget the name," the Editor replied. "In fact, I was rather vexed at the time about my friend Ross's book—and Mr. Bethune getting money from Lord Musselburgh; and I did not say very much. I am glad there is some explanation; one likes to think the best of a brother Scot. But you—you are not a Scot?" he demanded with a swift glance of inquiry.

"No, I am not," said Vincent, "but I am very much interested in Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter; and as they quite suddenly disappeared from London, I thought it very likely they had returned to the United States; and also, if they had come to New York, I imagined you would be sure to know."

"One thing is pretty certain," said Mr. Anstruther. "If George Bethune is in this city, he will be heard of to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow evening?" Vincent repeated, vaguely.

"The twenty-fifth!" exclaimed the Editor, with an astonished stare.

And yet the young man seemed none the wiser.

"It is evident you are no Scotchman," Mr. Anstruther said at length, and with good humour. "You don't remember that 'a blast o' Janwar win' blew hansel in on Robin'? The twenty-fifth of January—the birthday of Robert Burns!"

"Oh, yes—oh, certainly," said Vincent, with guilty haste.

"There will be a rare gathering of the clans to-morrow night," the Editor continued; "and if George Bethune is on this side the water, he'll either show up himself or somebody will have heard of him."

"I think he must be over here," Vincent said. "At first I imagined he might have gone to Scotland: he was thinking of a topographical and antiquarian book on the various places mentioned in the Scotch songs—and he had often spoken of making a pilgrimage through the country for that purpose. So I went down to Scotland for a few days, but I could hear nothing of him."

"What do you say—that you have been quite recently in Scotland?" Mr. Anstruther said, with a sudden accession of interest.

"About three weeks ago," was the answer.

"Well, well, well!" the Editor exclaimed, and he regarded the young man with quite a kindly curiosity. "Do ye tell me that! In Scotland—not more than three weeks since! And whereabouts—whereabouts?"

"I was in Edinburgh most of the time," Vincent said.

"In Edinburgh?—did ye see the Corstorphine Hills?" was the next eager question; and the man's eyes were no longer coldly scrutinising, but full of a lively interest and friendliness. "Ay, the Corstorphine Hills: ye would see them if ye went up to the top of Nelson's Monument, and looked away across the town—away along Princes Street—that wonderful view!—wonderful!—when I think of it, I seem to see it all a silver-white—and Scott's Monument towering high in the middle, like some splendid fountain turned to stone. Ay, ay, and ye were walking along Princes Street not more than three weeks ago; and I suppose ye were thinking of Old Christopher, and the Ettrick Shepherd, and Sir Walter, and Jeffrey, and the rest of them? Dear me, it's a kind of strange thing! Did ye go out to Holyrood? Did ye climb up Arthur's Seat? Did ye see Portobello, and Inch Keith, and the Berwick Law——"

"'The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,'" Vincent quoted, with a smile.

The other's eyes flashed recognition; and he laughed aloud.

"Ay, ay, that was a great favourite with the old man. Many's the time he has announced himself coming up these very stairs with that."

"Did Maisrie ever come with him?" Vincent asked—with his heart going a bit quicker.

"His granddaughter? Oh, yes, to be sure—sometimes. He was fond of coming down the night before we went to press, and looking over the columns of Scotch news, and having a chat. You see we have to boil down the smaller Scotch papers for local news—news that the bigger papers don't touch; and very often you notice a name that is familiar to you, or something of that kind. Well, now, I wish the old man was here this very minute! I do indeed—most heartily. We'd let bygones be bygones—no doubt I was mistaken—I'll back George Bethune for a true and loyal Scot. Ah say, man," continued Mr. Anstruther, pulling out his big silver watch—and now all his assumption of the reserved American manner was gone, and he was talking with enthusiastic emphasis—"There's a countryman of mine—a most worthy fellow—close by here, who would be glad to see any friend of old George Bethune's. It's just about his lunch time; and he'll no grudge ye a farl of oatcake and a bit of Dunlop cheese; in fact nothing pleases him better than keeping open house for his cronies. A man of sterling worth; and a man of substance, too: sooner or later, I expect he'll be going away back to the old country and buying a bit place for himself in his native county of Aberdeen. Well, well," said the Editor, as he locked his desk, and put on his hat, and opened the door for his visitor, "and to think it was but the other day ye were walking along Princes Street in Edinburgh! Did ye go out at night, when the old town was lit up?—a grand sight, wasn't it—nothing like it in the world! Ye must tell honest John—John MacVittie, that is—that ye've just come straight from the 'land of brown heath and shaggy wood,' and ye'll no want for a welcome!"

And indeed it was a very frank and friendly welcome he received when they at length reached Mr. MacVittie's place of business, and were shown into the merchant's private room. Here they found himself and his two partners (all Scotchmen) about to sit down at table; and places were immediately prepared for the new-comers. The meal was a much more varied affair than the Editor had foreshadowed: its remarkable

feature being, as Vincent was informed, that nearly everything placed on the board had been sent over from Scotland. Mr. MacVittie made a little apology.

"It's a kind of hobby of mine," said he; "and even with perishable things it's not so difficult nowadays, the ice-houses of the big steamers being so convenient. What would you like to drink, sir? I can give ye a choice of Talisker, Glenlivet, Long John, and Lagavulin; but perhaps ye would prefer something lighter in the middle of the day. I hope you don't object to the smell of the peats; we Scotch folk are rather fond of it; I think our good friend here, Anstruther, would rather have a sniff of the peat than a smell of the best canvas-back duck that was ever carried through a kitchen. I get those peats sent over from Islay: you see, I try to have Scotland—or some fragments of it—brought to me, since I cannot go to it."

"But why don't you go to Scotland, sir?" said Vincent—knowing he was speaking to a man of wealth.

"At my time of life," Mr. MacVittie answered, "one falls into certain ways and grooves, and it's an ill job getting out of them. No, I do not think I shall ever be in Scotland again, until I'm taken there—in a box. I shall have to be like the lady in 'The Gay Goss-hawk'—

"An asking, an asking, my father dear,
An asking grant ye me!
That if I die in merry England,
In Scotland you'll bury me."

"Oh, nonsense, John!" one of his partners cried. "Nonsense man! We'll have you building a castle up somewhere about Kincardine O'Neil; and every autumn we'll go over and shoot your grouse and kill your salmon for you. That's liker it!"

Now here were three sharp and shrewd business men met together in the very heart of one of the great commercial cities of the world; and the fourth was a purveyor of news (Vincent did not count; he was so wonderstruck at meeting people who had known George Bethune and Maisrie in former days, and so astonished and fascinated by any chance reference to them that he did not care to propound any opinions of his own: he was well content to listen), and it might naturally have been supposed that their talk would have been of the public topics of the hour—politics home and foreign, the fluctuations of trade, dealings with that portentous surplus that is always getting in the way, and so forth. But it was nothing of the

kind. It was all about the dinner of the Burns' Society of New York, to be given at Sutherland's in Liberty-street the following evening, in celebration of the birthday of the Scotch poet; and Tom MacVittie—a huge man with a reddish-brown beard and a bald head—in the enthusiasm of the moment was declaring that again and again, on coming across a song, by some one of the minor Scotch poets, that was particularly fine, he wished he had the power to steal it and hand it over to the Ayrshire bard—no doubt on the principle that 'whosoever hath, to him shall be given.' Then there was a comparison of this gem and that; favourites were mentioned and extolled; the air was thick with Willie Laidlaw, Allan Cunningham, Nicol, Hogg, Motherwell, Tannahill, and the rest; while the big Tom MacVittie, returning to his original thesis, maintained that it would be only fair punishment if John Mayne were mulcted of his 'Logan Braes,' because of his cruel maltreatment of 'Helen of Kirkconnell.'

"Yes, I will say," he continued—and his fist was ready to come down on the table if needs were, "Robbie himself might well be proud of 'Logan Braes;' and John Mayne deserves to have something done to him for trying to spoil so fine a thing as 'Helen of Kirkconnell.' I cannot forgive that. I cannot forgive that at all. No excuse. Do ye think the man that wrote the 'Siller Gun' did not know he was making the fine old ballad into a fashionable rignarole? Confound him, I would take 'Logan Braes' from him in a minute, if I could, and hand it over to Robbie——"

"Did you ever notice," interposed the editor of the Scotch paper, "the clever little trick of repetition in the middle of every alternate verse——"

'By Logan's streams that rin so deep,
Fu' aft wi' glee I've herded sheep;
Herded sheep, or gathered slaes,
Wi' my dear lad on Logan braes.
But wae's my heart, thae days are gane,
And I wi' grief may herd alane;
While my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes.'

I do not remember Burns using that device, though it was familiar in Scotch song—you recollect 'Annie Laurie'—'her waist ye weel might span.' And Landor used it in 'Rose Aylmer'—

'Rose Aylmer, all were thine.
Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes——'

"I would like now," continued Tom MacVittie, with a certain impatience over the introduction of a glaiket Englisher, "to hand over to Robbie 'There's nae luck about the house.' The authorship is disputed anyhow; though I tell you that if William Julius Mickle ever wrote those verses I'll just eat my hat—and coat, too! It was Jean Adams wrote that song; I say it was none other than Jean Adams. Mickle—and his Portuguese stuff——"

"God bless me, Tom, do you forget 'Cumnor Hall'?" his brother exclaimed.

"'Cumnor Hall?' I do not forget 'Cumnor Hall?'" Tom MacVittie rejoined, with a certain disdain. "'Cumnor Hall!'—a wretched piece of fustian, that no one would have thought of twice, only that Walter Scott's ear was taken with the first verse. Proud minions—simple nymphs—Philomel on yonder thorn: do ye mean that a man who wrote stuff like that could write like this—

'Rise up and mak' a clean fireside,
Put on the mickle pot;
Gie little Kate her cotton gown,
And Jock his Sunday's coat;
And mak' their shoon as black as slacs,
Their stockin's white as snaw;
It's a' to pleasure our gudeman—
He likes to see them braw.'

That's human nature, man; there you've got goodwife, and the goodman, and the bairns; none o' your Philomels, and nymphs, and swains! That bletherin' idiot, Dr. Beattie, wrote additional verses—well he might almost be forgiven for the last couplet,

'The present moment is our ain,
The neist we never saw.'——"

"That was a favourite quotation of old George Bethune's," said the elder MacVittie, with a smile, to Vincent.

The young man was startled out of a reverie. It was so strange for him to sit and hear conversation like this, and to imagine that George Bethune had joined in it, and no doubt led it, in former days, and that perhaps Maisrie had been permitted to listen.

"Yes," he made answer modestly; "and no man ever carried the spirit of it more completely into his daily life."

"What makes ye think he is in New York, or in the United States, at least?" was the next question.

"I can hardly say," said Vincent, "except that I knew he had many friends here."

"If George Bethune is in New York," Tom MacVittie interposed, in his decisive way, "I'll wager he'll show up at Sutherland's to-morrow night—I'll wager my coat and hat!"

And then the Editor put in a word.

"If I thought that," said he, "I would go along to the Secretary, and see if I could have a ticket reserved for him. I'm going to ask Mr. Harris here to be my guest; for if he isn't a Scotchman, at least he has been in Scotland since any of us were there."

"And I hope you don't need to be a Scotchman in order to have an admiration for Robert Burns," said Vincent; and with that appropriate remark the symposium broke up; for if MacVittie, MacVittie, and Hogg chose to enliven their brief mid-day meal with reminiscences of their native land and her poets, they were not in the habit of wasting much time or neglecting their business.

A good part of the next day Vincent spent in the society of Hugh Anstruther; for in the stir and ferment then prevailing among the Scotch circles in New York, it was possible that George Bethune might be heard of at any moment; and, indeed, they paid one or two visits to Nassau-street, to ask of the Secretary of the Burns Society whether Mr. Bethune had not turned up in the company of some friend applying for an additional ticket. And in the meantime Vincent had frankly confessed to this new acquaintance what had brought him over to the United States.

"Man, do ye think I could not guess that!" Hugh Anstruther exclaimed: he was having luncheon with Vincent at the latter's hotel. "Here are you, a fresh-elected member of Parliament—and I dare say as proud as Punch in consequence; and within a measurable distance of you taking your place in the House, you leave England, and come away over to America to hunt up an old man and a young girl. Do I wonder?—I do not wonder. A bonnier lassie, a gentler creature, does not step the ground anywhere; ay, and of good birth and blood, too; though there may be something in that to account for George Bethune's disappearance. A proud old deevil, ye see; and wilful; and always with those wild dreams of his of getting a property——"

"Well, but is there the slightest possibility of their ever getting that property?" Vincent interposed.

"There is a possibility of my becoming the President of the United States of America," was the rather contemptuous (and

in point of fact, inaccurate) answer. The courts have decided: you can't go and disturb people who have been in possession for generations—at least, I should think not! As for the chapter of accidents: no doubt the estates might come to them for want of a more direct heir; such things certainly do happen; but how often? However, the old man is opinionated."

"Not as much as he was," Vincent said. "Not on that point, at least. He does not talk as much about it as he used—so Maisrie says."

"Oh, Maisrie? I was not sure. A pretty name. Well, I congratulate you; and when, in the ordinary course of things, it falls upon you to provide her with a home, I hope she will lead a more settled, a happier life, than I fancy she could have led in that wandering way."

Vincent was silent. There were certain things about which he could not talk to this new acquaintance, even though he now seemed so well disposed towards old George Bethune and that solitary girl. There were matters about which he had given up questioning himself: mysteries that appeared incapable of explanation. In the meantime his hopes and speculations were narrowed down to this one point: would Maisrie's grandfather—from whichever part of the world he might hail—suddenly make his appearance at this celebration to-night? For in that case she herself could not be far off.

And wildly enthusiastic this gathering proved to be, even from the outset. Telegrams were flying this way and that (for in the old country the ceremonies had begun some hours previously); there was no distinction between members and friends; and as Scot encountered Scot, each vied with the other in recalling the phrases and intonation of their younger years. In the midst of this turmoil of arrival and joyous greeting, Vincent's gaze was fixed on the door; at any moment there might appear there a proud-featured old man, white-haired, keen-eyed, of distinguished bearing—a striking figure—and not more picturesque than welcome! For would not Maisrie, later on in the evening, be still waiting up for him? And if, at the end of the proceedings, one were to walk home with the old man, and have a chance of saying five words to Maisrie herself, by way of good-night? No, he would not reproach her! He would only take her hand and say, 'To-morrow—to-morrow, Maisrie, I am coming to scold you!'

Thin Scot, burly Scot, red-headed Scot, black-avised Scot, Lowlander and Highlander—all came trooping in, eager,

talkative, delighted to meet friends and acquaintances; but there was no George Bethune. And when they had settled down in their places, and when dinner had begun, Hugh Anstruther, who was 'Croupier' on this occasion, turned to his guest and said:—

"You must not be disappointed. I hardly expected him; I could not hear of any one who had invited him. But it is quite likely he may turn up later on—very likely, indeed, if he is anywhere within travelling distance of New York. George Bethune is not the one to forget the twenty-fifth of January; and of course he must know that many of his friends are assembled here."

Then presently the Croupier turned to his guest and said in an undertone—

"There's a toast that's not down in the list; and I'm going to ask ye to drink it; we'll drink it between ourselves. Fill your glass, man—bless me, what's the use of water!—see, here's some hock—Sutherland's famous for his hock—and now this is the toast. 'Here's to Scotch lassies, wherever they may be!'"

"Yes—'wherever they may be,'" Vincent repeated, absently.

"Oh, don't be down-hearted!" his lion-maned friend said, with cheerful good humour. "If that self-willed old deevil has taken away the lassie, thinking to make some grand heiress of her, he'll find it's easier to talk about royal blood than to keep a comfortable house over her head; and some day he may be glad enough to bring her back and see her safely provided with a husband well-to-do and able to take care of her. Royal blood?—I'm not sure that I haven't heard him maintain that the Bethunes were a more ancient race than the Stewarts. I shouldn't wonder if he claimed to be descended from Macbeth, King of Scotland. Oh, he holds his head high, the old scoundrel that has 'stole bonny Glenlyon away.' But you'll be even with him yet; you'll be even with him yet. Why, if he comes in to-night, and finds ye sitting here, he'll be as astonished as Maclean of Duart was at Inverary, when he looked up from the banquet and saw his wife at the door."

So Vincent had perforce to wait in vague expectancy; but nevertheless the proceedings of the evening interested him not a little, and all the more that he happened to know two of the principal speakers. For to Mr. Tom MacVittie was entrusted the toast of the evening—"The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns"—and very eloquently indeed did the big merchant deal

with that well-worn theme. What the subject lacked in novelty was amply made up by the splendid enthusiasm of his audience: the most familiar quotations—rolled out with MacVittie's breadth of accent and strong north-country burr—were welcome as the songs of Zion sung in a strange land; this was the magic speech that could stir their hearts, and raise visions of their far-off and beloved native home. Nor were they at all *laudatores temporis acti*—these perfervid and kindly Scots. When the Croupier rose to propose the toast that had been allotted to him—"The Living Bards of Scotland"—cheer after cheer greeted names of which Vincent, in his southern ignorance, had never even heard. Indeed, to this stranger, it seemed as if the Scotland of our own day must be simply alive with poets; and not of the kind that proclaimed at Paisley "They sterve us while we're leevin, and raise moniments to us when we're deed;" but of a quiet and modest character, their subjects chiefly domestic, occasionally humorous, more frequently exhibiting a sincere and effective pathos. For, of course, the Croupier justified himself with numerous excerpts; and there was no stint to the applause of this warm-blooded audience; insomuch that Vincent's idle fancies went wandering away to those (to him) little known minstrels in the old land, with a kind of wish that they could be made aware how they were regarded by their countrymen across the sea. Nay, when the Croupier concluded his speech, "coupling with this toast" a whole string of names, the young man, carried away by the prevailing ardour, said—

"Mr. Anstruther, surely nothing will do justice to this toast but a drop of whiskey!"

—and the Croupier, passing him the decanter, said in reply—

"Surely—surely—on an evening like this; and yet I'm bound to say that if it had not been for the whiskey, my list of living Scotch poets would have been longer."

The evening passed; and Vincent's hopes, that had been too lightly and easily raised, were slowly dwindling. Had George Bethune been in New York, or within any reasonable distance of it, he would almost certainly have come to this celebration, at which several of his old friends were assembled. As Vincent walked home that night to his hotel, the world seemed dark and wide; and he felt strangely alone. He knew not which way to turn now. For one thing, he was not at all convinced, as Hugh Anstruther appeared to be, that it was Mr. Bethune who had taken his granddaughter away, and that, sooner or later, he

would turn up at one or other of those trans-Atlantic gatherings of his Scotch friends. Vincent could not forget Maisrie's last farewell; and if this separation were of her planning and executing, then there was far less chance of his encountering them in any such haphazard fashion. 'It is good-bye for ever between you and me,' she had written. And of what avail now were her wild words, 'Vincent, I love you?—I love you?—you are my dearest in all the world! You will remember, always and always, whenever you think of me, that that is so: you will not forget: remember that I love you always, and am thinking of you!' Idle phrases, that the winds had blown away! Of what use were they now? Nay, why should he believe them, any more than the pretty professions that Mrs. de Lara had made on board the steamer? Were they not both women, those two? And then he drew back with scorn of himself; and rebuked the lying Satan that seemed to walk by his side. Solitariness—wounded pride—disappointment—almost despair—might drive him to say or imagine mad things at the moment; but never—never once—in his heart of hearts had he really doubted Maisrie's faith and honour. All other things might be; not that.

He resolved to leave New York and go out west; it was just possible that Maisrie had taken some fancy for revisiting the place of her birth; he guessed they might have certain friends there also. Hugh Anstruther came to the railway station to see him off.

"Yes," he said, "you may hear something about them in Omaha; but it is hardly probable; for those western cities grow at a prodigious pace, and the traces of people who leave them get very soon obliterated. Besides, the population is more or less shifting; there are ups and downs; and you must remember it is a considerable time since Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter left Omaha. However, in case you don't learn anything of them there, I have brought you a letter of introduction to Daniel Thompson of Toronto—the well-known banker—you may have heard of him—and he is as likely as any one to know anything that can be known of George Bethune. They are old friends."

Vincent was very grateful.

"And I suppose," he said, as he was getting his smaller belongings into the car, "I shan't hear anything further of that fellow de Lara?"

"Not a bit—not a bit!" the good-natured Scotch Editor

made answer. "You took the right way with him at the beginning. He'll probably call you a scoundrel and a black-guard in one or two obscure papers; but that won't break bones."

"I have a stout oak cudgel that can, though," said Vincent, "if there should be need."

It was a long and a lonely journey; Vincent was in no mood for making acquaintances; and doubtless his fellow-passengers considered him an excellent specimen of the proud and taciturn travelling Englishman. But at last he came in sight of the wide valley of the Missouri, with its long mud-banks and yellow water-channels; and beyond that again the flat plain of the city, dominated by the twin-spired High School perched on a distant height. And he could see how Omaha had grown even within the short time that had elapsed since his last visit; where he could remember one-storeyed tenements stuck at haphazard amongst trees and waste bits of green there were now streets with tram-cars and important public buildings; the city had extended in every direction; it was a vast wilderness of houses that he beheld beyond the wide river. Perhaps Maisrie had been surprised too—on coming back to her old home? Alas! it seemed so big a place in which to search for any one; and he knew of no kindly Scotch Editor who might help.

And very soon he got to recognise that Hugh Anstruther's warnings had been well founded. Omaha seemed to have no past, nor any remembrance of bygone things; the city was too busy pushing ahead to think of those who had gone under, or left. It is true that at the offices of the Union Pacific Railway, he managed to get some scant information about the young engineer with whom fortune had dealt so hardly; but these were not personal reminiscences; there were new men everywhere, and Maisrie's father had not been known to any of them. As for the child-orphan and the old man who had come to adopt her, who was likely to remember them? They were not important enough; Omaha had its 'manifest destiny' to think of; besides, they were now gone some years—and some years in a western city is a century.

This was not a wholesome life that Vincent was leading—so quite alone was he—and anxious—and despairing. He could not sleep very well. At intervals during the night he would start up, making sure that he heard the sound of a violin; and sometimes the distant and almost inaudible notes seemed to have a suggestion of Maisrie's voice in them—'*I daurna tryst wi' you,*

Willie . . I daurna tryst ye here . . But we'll hold our tryst in heaven, Willie . . In the spring-time o' the year'—and then he would listen more and more intently, and convince himself it was only the moaning of the wind down the empty street. He neglected his meals. When he took up a newspaper, the printed words conveyed no meaning to him. And then he would go away out wandering again, through those thoroughfares that had hardly any interest for him now; while he was becoming more and more hopeless as the long hours went by, and feeling himself baffled at every point.

But before turning his face eastward again, he had written to Mr. Daniel Thompson of Toronto, mentioning that he had a letter of introduction from Hugh Anstruther, and stating what had brought him out here to the west. Then he went on:

“Mr. Bethune was never very communicative about money-matters—at least, to me; indeed, he seemed to consider such things too trivial for talking about. At the same time I understood from him that when his son, Miss Bethune's father, died, there was either some remnant of his shattered fortunes—or perhaps it was some fund subscribed by sympathising friends—I never could make out which, and was not curious enough to inquire—that produced a certain small annual income. Now I thought that if I could discover the trustees who paid over this income, they would certainly know where Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter were now living; or, on the other hand, supposing the fund was derived from some investment, if I could find out the bank which held the securities, they also might be able to tell me. But all my inquiries have been in vain. I am a stranger; people don't want to be bothered; sometimes I can see they are suspicious. However, it has occurred to me that you, as an old friend of Mr. Bethune, might chance to know who they are who have this fund in trust; and if you could tell me, you would put me under a life-long debt of gratitude. If you were aware of all the circumstances, you would be convinced that no ill-use is likely to be made of the information. When I first became acquainted with Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter, they seemed to me to be living a very happy and simple and contented life in London; and I am afraid I am in some measure responsible for their having suddenly resolved to leave these quiet circumstances, and take to that wandering life of which Miss Bethune seemed so sadly tired. If I can get no news of them here, I propose returning home by Toronto and Montreal, and I shall then give myself the pleasure of calling

upon you, when I may be able to assure you that, if you should hear anything of Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune, you would be doing no injury to them, or to any one, in letting me know."

Then came the answer—from a cautious Scot.

"Dear Sir,—As you rightly observe, my old friend George Bethune was never very communicative about money matters; and perhaps he was even less so with me than with others—fearing that any such disclosures might be misconstrued into an appeal for help. I was vaguely aware, like yourself, that he had some small annual income—for the maintenance of his granddaughter, as I understood; but from whence it was derived I had, and have, no knowledge whatever; so that I regret I cannot give you the information you seek. I shall be pleased to see you on your way through Toronto; and still further pleased to give you any assistance that may lie in my power."

There was not much encouragement in this letter; but after these weary and lonely days in this hopeless city, he was glad to welcome any friendly hand held out to him. And he grew to think that he would be more likely to hear of Maisrie in Toronto or Montreal than in this big town on the banks of the Missouri. Canada had been far longer her home. She used to talk of Toronto or Montreal—more rarely of Quebec—as if she were familiar with every feature of them; whereas she hardly ever mentioned Omaha. He remembered her telling him how she used to climb up to the top of the tower of Toronto College, to look away across the wide landscape to the lofty column of soft white smoke that rose from Niagara Falls into the blue of the summer sky. He recalled her description of the small verandahed villa in which they lived, out amongst the sandy roads and trees and gardens of the suburbs. Why, it was the *Toronto Globe* or the *Toronto Mail* that old George Bethune was reading, when first he had dared to address them in Hyde Park. Then Montreal: he recollected so well her talking of the Grey Nunnery, of Notre Dame, of Bonsecours Market, of the ice palaces, and toboggan slides, and similar amusements of the hard northern winter. But a trivial little incident that befell him on his arrival in Toronto persuaded him, more than any of these reminiscences, that in coming to Canada he was getting nearer to Maisrie—that at any moment he might be within immediate touch of her.

It was rather late in the evening when he reached his hotel;

he was tired; and he thought he would go soon to bed. His room looked out into a side street that was pretty sure to be deserted at this hour; so that, just as he was turning off the light, he was a trifle surprised to hear a slight and distant sound as of singing; and from idle curiosity he went to the window. There was a full moon; the opposite pavement and the fronts of the houses were white in the cold and clear radiance; silence reigned save for this chance sound he had heard. At the same moment he described the source of it. There were two young girls coming along the pavement opposite—hurrying home, apparently, arm-in-arm—while they amused themselves by singing a little in an underhand way, one of them even attempting a second from time to time. And how could he mistake the air?—it was the *Claire Fontaine*! The girls were singing in no sad fashion; but idly and carelessly to amuse themselves on their homeward way; and indeed so quietly that even in this prevailing silence he could only guess at the words—

*J'ai perdu ma maitresse
Sans l'avoir mérité,
Pour un bouquet de roses
Que je lui refusai.*

* * * *

*Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier,
Et moi et ma maitresse
Dans les mêmes amitiés.*

And then the two slight, dark figures went by in the white moonlight; and eventually the sound ceased in the distance. But he had been greatly cheered and comforted. This was a friendly and familiar air. He had reached Maisrie's home at last; *la Claire Fontaine* proclaimed it. And if, when he neared the realms of sleep, his heart was full of the old refrain—

*Lui ya longtemps que je l'aime,
Jamais je ne l'oublierai,*

there was something of hopefulness there as well: he had left the despair of Omaha behind him.

CHAPTER XXI.

ENLIGHTENMENT.

NEXT morning he was up and out betimes—wandering through this town that somehow seemed to be pervaded by Maisrie's presence, or, at least, by recollections of her and associations with her. He had hardly left his hotel when he heard a telegraph-boy whistling the air of '*Isabeau s'y promène.*' He went from one street to another, recognising this and that public building: the polished marble pillars shining in the cold, clear sunlight. Then he walked away up College Avenue, and entered Queen's Park; and there, after some little delay, he obtained permission to ascend to the top of the University tower. But in vain he sought along the southern horizon for the cloud of soft white smoke of which Maisrie had often spoken; the distant Niagara was frozen motionless and mute. When he returned to the more frequented thoroughfares, the business life of the city was now in full flow; nevertheless he kept his eyes on the alert; even amid this hurrying crowd, the figure of George Bethune would not readily escape recognition. But, indeed, he was only seeking to pass the time, for he thought he ought not to call on the banker before mid-day.

Mr. Daniel Thompson he found to be a tall, spare man, of well over sixty, with short white whiskers, a face otherwise clean shaven, and eyes that were shrewd and observant, but far from unkindly. He listened to the young man's tale with evident interest.

"And so you have come all the way across the Atlantic," said he, "to look for my old friend George Bethune and little Maggie."

"Maggie," repeated Vincent, somewhat startled. "Maisrie, you mean."

"Maisrie!" the banker said, with a certain impatience. "Does he still keep up that nonsense? The girl's name is Margaret; Margaret Bethune—surely a good enough name for any Christian. But his head is just full of old ballads and stuff of that kind; any fancy that strikes him is just as real to him as fact; I dare say he could persuade himself that he was

intimately acquainted with Sir Patrick Spens and the Scots lords who were drinking in Dunfermline town——”

“But in any case,” Vincent protested (for how could he surrender the name that was so deeply graven on his heart?) “Maisrie is only a form of Margaret—as Marjorie is—a pet name——”

“Maisrie!” said the banker, contemptuously. “Who ever heard of any human creature being called Maisrie—outside of poetry-books and old ballads? I warned the little monkey, many and many a day ago, when I first got her to write to me, that she must sign her own name, or she would see what I would do to her. Well, how is the little Omahussy? What does she look like now? A sly little wretch she used to be—making people fond of her with her earnest eyes——”

“I don’t think you quite understand,” said Vincent, who resented this familiar tone, though in truth it only meant an affectionate kindness. “Miss Bethune is no longer the little girl you seem to imagine; she is quite a young lady now—and taller than most.”

“The little Omahussy grown up to be a tall young lady?” said he, in a pleased fashion. “Yes, yes, I suppose so. No doubt. And tall, you say? Even when she was here last she was getting on; but the only photograph I have of her was done long before that—when she was hardly more than twelve; and then I’m an old bachelor, you see; I’m not accustomed to watch children grow up; and somehow I remember her mostly as when I first knew her—a shy young thing, and yet something of a little woman in her ways. Grown up good-looking, too, I suppose?—both her father and mother were handsome.”

“If you saw her now,” said Vincent, “I think you would say she was beautiful; though it might not be her beauty that would take your attention the most.”

The elderly banker regarded this young man for a second or so—and with a favouring glance: he was clearly well impressed.

“I hope you will not consider me intrusive or impertinent if I ask you a question,” said he. “I am an old friend of George Bethune’s—perhaps the oldest alive now; and besides that I have always regarded myself as a sort of second father to the little Margaret—though their wandering way of life has taken her out of my care. Now—don’t answer unless you like—tell me to mind my own business—but at the same time one would almost infer, from your coming over here in search of

them, that you had some particular interest in the young lady——”

“It is the chief interest of my life,” said Vincent, with simple frankness. “And that is why I cannot rest until I find them.”

“Well, now, one question more,” the banker continued. “I don’t wish to pry into any young lady’s secrets—but—but perhaps there may be some understanding between her and you?”

“I hope so,” said Vincent.

“And the young wretch never wrote me a line to tell me of it!” Mr. Thompson exclaimed—but it was very obvious that this piece of news had caused him no chagrin. “The little Omahussy grows up to be a fine and tall young lady; chooses her sweetheart for herself; thinks of getting married and all the rest of it; and not a word to me! Here is filial gratitude for you! Why, does she forget what I have promised to do for her? Not that I ever said so to her; you don’t fill a school-girl’s head full of wedding fancies; but her grandfather knew; her grandfather must have told her when this affair was settled between you and her——”

But here Vincent had to interpose and explain that nothing was settled; that unhappily everything was unsettled; and further he went on to tell of all that had happened preceding the disappearance of Maisrie and her grandfather. For this man seemed of a kindly nature; he was an old friend of those two; then Vincent had been very much alone of late—there was no one in Omaha in whom he could confide. Mr. Thompson listened with close attention; and at last he said—

“I can see that you have been placed in a very peculiar position; and that you have stood the test well. The description of my old friend Bethune that your father put before you could be made to look very plausible; and I imagine that most young men would have been staggered by it. I can fancy that a good many young men would have been apt to say ‘Like grandfather, like granddaughter’—and would have declined to have anything more to do with either. And yet I understand that, however doubtful or puzzled you may have been, at least you never had any suspicion of Margaret?”

“Suspicion?” said Vincent. “Of the girl whom I hope to make my wife? I need not answer the question.”

Mr. Thompson gave a bit of a laugh, in a quiet, triumphant manner,

"Evidently my little Omahussy had her eyes widely and wisely open when she made her choice," said he, apparently to himself.

"And what can I do now?" Vincent went on, in a half-despairing way. "You say you are certain they are not in Canada or they would have come to see you. The Scotchmen in New York told me they were positive Mr. Bethune was not there, or he would have shown up at the Burns Anniversary. Well, where can I go now? I must find her—I cannot rest until I have found her—to have everything explained—and—and to find out her reason for going away——"

"I wonder," said Mr. Thompson, slowly, "what old George had in his head this time? To him, as I say, fancies are just as real as facts, and I cannot but imagine that this has been his doing. She would not ask him to break up all his arrangements and ways of living for her sake; she was too submissive and dependent on him for that; it is she who has conformed to some sudden whim of his. You had no quarrel with him?"

"A quarrel? Nothing of the kind—not the shadow of a quarrel!" Vincent exclaimed.

"Did you mention to him those reports about himself?" was the next question.

"Well, yes, I did, in a casual sort of way," the young man answered honestly. "But it was merely to account for any possible opposition on the part of my father; and, in fact, I wanted Mr. Bethune to consent to an immediate marriage between Maisrie and myself."

"And what did Margaret say to that?" Mr. Thompson proceeded to ask; he was clearly trying to puzzle out for himself the mystery of this situation.

"You mean the last time I saw her—the very last time?" the young man answered him. "Well, she seemed greatly troubled: as I mentioned to you, there was some wild talk about degradation—fancy degradation having anything to do with Maisrie Bethune!—and she said it would be better for us to separate; and she made me promise certain things. But I wouldn't listen to her; I was going down to Mendover; I made sure everything would come right as soon as I could get back. And then, when I got back, they were gone—and not a trace of them left behind."

"Had old George got any news about the Balloray estates?" the banker asked, with a quick look.

"Not that I know of," Vincent answered. "Besides, if there

had been any news of importance, it would have been in the papers; we should all have seen it!"

"And you and Margaret parted on good terms?"

"Good terms?" said Vincent. "That is hardly the phrase. But beyond what I told you, I cannot say more. There are some things that are for myself alone."

"Quite right—quite right," said Mr. Thompson, hastily, "I quite understand."

At this moment a card was brought in.

"Tell the gentleman I will see him directly," was the reply.

Vincent, of course, arose.

"I confess," said the banker, "that the whole affair perplexes me; and I should like a little time to think it over. Have you any engagement for this evening?"

"No," said Vincent; "I only arrived in Toronto last night; and I don't suppose I know any one in the town."

"Come and dine with me at my club, then, this evening, will you? Just our two selves: the — club, at seven. I want to talk to you about this matter; for I have a particular interest, as you may suppose, in the little Maggie; and I want to know what it all means. I should like to learn something more about you, too, in view of certain possibilities. And perhaps I can give you a few hints about my old friend George, for you don't quite seem to understand, even with all the chances you have had. Yes, I can see a little doubt in your mind at times. You would rather shut your eyes—for Margaret's sake, no doubt; but I want to show you that there isn't much of that needed, if you only look the right way. However, more of that when we meet. At seven, then. Sorry to seem so rude—but this is an appointment——"

That proved to be a memorable evening. To begin with small things: Vincent, after his late solitary wanderings in unfamiliar conditions of life, now and suddenly found himself at home. The quiet, old-fashioned unobtrusive comfort of this club; the air of staid respectability; the manner of the waiters; the very cooking, and the order in which the wines were handed—all appeared to him to be so thoroughly English; and the members, judging by little points here and there, seemed also to be curiously English in their habits and ways. He had received a similar impression on his first visit to Toronto; but on this occasion it was more marked than ever; perhaps the good-humoured friendliness of this Scotch banker had something to do with it, and their being able to talk about

people in whom they had a common concern. However, it was after dinner, in a snug corner of the smoking-room, that Mr. Thompson proceeded to talk of his old friend in a fashion that considerably astonished the young man who was his guest.

"Yes," he continued, after he had examined and cross-examined Vincent with regard to certain occurrences, "there is no doubt at all that George Bethune is a rank old impostor; but the person on whom he has mostly imposed, all his life through, has been—George Bethune. I suppose, now, every one of us has in his nature a certain amount of self-deception; it would be a pity if it weren't so. But here is this man who has been gifted with a quite unlimited faculty of self-deception; and with a splendid imagination, too—the imagination of a poet, without a poet's responsibilities; so that he lives in a world entirely of his own creation, and sees things just as he wants to see them. As I say, he has the imagination of a poet, and the unworldliness of a poet, without any one calling him to do anything to prove his powers; he is too busy constructing his own fanciful universe for himself; and all the common things of life—debts, bills, undertakings, and so forth—they have no existence for him. Ah, well, well," Mr. Thompson went on, as he lay back in his chair, and watched the blue curls of smoke from his cigar, "I don't know whether to call it a pity or not. Sometimes one is inclined to envy him his happy temperament. I don't know any human creature who has a braver spirit, whose conscience is clearer to himself, who can sleep with greater equanimity and content. Why should he mind what circumstances are around him when in a single second he can transport himself to the Dowie Dens o' Yarrow or be off on a raid with Kinmont Willie? And there's nothing that he will not seize if he has a mind to it—a sounding name, a tradition, a historical incident—why, he laid hold of the Bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie, carried them off bodily to Balloray, and I suppose wild horses wouldn't tear from him the admission that Balloray never had anything to do with those mill-dams or the story of the two sisters——"

"I know," said Vincent; "Maisrie told me about that."

"Maisrie!" said Mr. Thompson, with a return of his former impatience. "That is another of his fantasticalities. I tell you her name is Margaret ——"

"But she has been Maisrie to me, and Maisrie she will be to me always," Vincent made answer stoutly—for surely he had some right to speak on this matter too. "As I said this

morning, it is only a pet name for Margaret; and if she chooses to use it, to please her grandfather, or to please herself even——”

“Stay a moment: I want to show you something.”

The banker put his hand into his breast-pocket; and pulled out an envelope.

“Not the photograph?” said Vincent rather breathlessly.

Mr. Thompson smiled in his quiet, sagacious way.

“When I mentioned this portrait to you to-day,” said he, “I saw something in your eyes—though you were too modest to put your request into words. Well, I have brought it; here it is; and if you’ll look at the foot you’ll see that the little Omahussy signs herself, as she ought to sign herself, ‘Margaret Bethune.’”

And what a revelation was this, of what Maisrie had been in the years before he had known her! The quaint, prim, small miss!—he could have laughed, with a kind of delight: only that here were those calm, grave, earnest eyes, that seemed to know him, that seemed to speak to him. Full of wistfulness they were, and dreams: they said to him, ‘I am looking forward; I am waiting till I meet you—my friend; life has that in store—for you and me.’

“I thought you would be interested,” said Mr. Thompson, blandly. “And I know you would like me to give you that photograph: perhaps you think you have some right to it, having won the young lady herself——”

“Won her?” said Vincent, still contemplating this strange, quaint portrait that seemed to speak to him somehow. “It hardly looks like it.”

“Well, I cannot give you the photograph,” the elderly Scotchman continued, in his friendly way, “but, if you like, I will have it copied—perhaps even enlarged, if it will stand it—and I will send you one——”

“Will you?” said Vincent, with a flash of gratitude in his eyes. “To me it would be simply a priceless treasure.”

“I just thought it would be,” Mr. Thompson said, considerably. “I’ve seen something of the ways of young people in my time. Yes; I’ll send you a copy or two as soon as I can get them done.”

Vincent handed back the photograph—reluctantly, and keeping his eyes on it until it had disappeared.

“I brought it out to show you she could sign her name properly when under proper instruction,” the banker continued. “And now to return to her grandfather, who seems to have

puzzled you a little, as well might be the case. I can see how you have been trying to blind yourself to certain things: no doubt you looked towards Margaret, and thought she would make up for all. But I surmise you have been a little unjust to my old friend; notwithstanding your association with him, you have not quite understood him; and perhaps that is hardly to be wondered at. And certainly you would never take him to be what I consider him to be—a very great man who has been spoiled by a fatal inheritance. I do truly and honestly believe there were the makings of a great man in George Bethune—a man with his indomitable pluck and self-reliance, his imagination, his restless energy, his splendid audacity and independence of character. Even now I see something heroic in him: he seems to me a man of heroic build—of heroic attitude towards the rest of the world: people may say what they like about George Bethune; but I know him better than most, and I wholly admire him and love him. If it hadn't been for that miserable property! I suppose now, a large estate may turn out a fortunate or unfortunate legacy accordingly as you use it; but if your legacy is only the knowledge that the estate ought to be yours, and isn't, that is a fine set of circumstances! And I have little doubt it was to forget that wretched lawsuit, to escape from a ceaseless and useless disappointment, that he took refuge in a world of imagination, and built up delusions round about him—just as other people take refuge in gin or in opium. At all events, his spirit has not been crushed. Did you ever hear him whine and complain?—I should think not! He has kept a stout heart, has old George Bethune. Perhaps, indeed, his pride has been excessive. Here am I, for example: I'm getting well on in years, and I haven't a single near relative now living; I've scraped together a few sixpences in my time; and nothing would give me greater pleasure than if George Bethune were to come to me and ask me to share my purse with him. And he knows it too. But would he? Not a bit! Rather than come to me and get some useful sum, he would go and get a few pounds out of some newspaper-office on account of one of his frantic schemes to do something fine for poor old Scotland. No," the banker proceeded, with rather an injured air, "I suppose I'm not distinguished enough. Friend George has some very high and mighty notions about the claims of long descent—and *noblesse oblige*—and all that. It is a condescension on his part to accept help from any one; and it is the privilege of those who

have a birth and lineage like himself to be allowed to come to his aid. I'm only Thompson. If I were descended from Richard Cœur de Lion I suppose it would be different. Has he ever accepted any money from you?"

"Never," said Vincent—who was not going to recall a few restaurant bills and cab fares.

"No," resumed the banker. "Your name is Harris. But when it comes to Lord Musselburgh, that is quite different, that is all right. No doubt Lord Musselburgh was quite proud to be allowed to subscribe—how much was it?—towards a book that never came out."

"Oh, but I ought to explain that that money was paid back," said Vincent, quickly.

"Paid back?" repeated the banker, staring. "That is a new feature, indeed! The money paid back to Lord Musselburgh? How did that come about? How did friend George yield to a weakness of that kind?"

"The fact is," said Vincent, blushing like a schoolboy, "I paid it."

"Without letting the old gentleman know?"

"Yes."

"Then excuse my saying so," Mr. Thompson observed, "but you threw away your money to very little purpose. If George Bethune is willing to take a cheque from Lord Musselburgh—if he can do so without the slightest loss of self-respect or dignity—why should not his lordship be allowed to help a brother Scot? Why should you interfere?"

"It was for Maisrie's sake," said Vincent, looking down.

"Ah, yes, yes," the banker said, knitting his brows. "That is where the trouble comes in. I shouldn't mind letting George Bethune go his own way; he is all right; his self-sufficiency will carry him through anything: but for a sensitive girl like that it must be terrible. I wonder how much she suspects," he went on. "I wonder how much she sees. Or if it is possible he has blinded her as well as himself to their circumstances? For you must remember this—I am talking to you now, Mr. Harris, as one who may have a closer relationship with these two—you must remember this, that to himself George Bethune's conscience is as clear as that of a one-year-old child. Do you think he sees anything shady or unsatisfactory in these little transactions or forgetfulnesses of his? He is careless of money because he despises it. If he had any, and you wanted it, it would be yours."

"I know that," said Vincent, eagerly; and he told the story of their meeting the poor woman in Hyde Park.

"Take that string of charges you spoke of," the banker resumed. "I have not the least doubt that from the point of view of the people who discovered those things their story was quite accurate. Except, perhaps, about his calling himself Lord Bethune: I don't believe that, and never heard of it; that was more likely a bit of toadyism on the part of some bar-loungers. But, as I say, from a solicitor's point of view, George Bethune would no doubt be regarded as a habitual impostor; whereas to himself he is no impostor at all, but a perfectly honourable person, whose every act can challenge the light of day. If there is any wrong or injury in the relations between him and the world, be sure he considers himself the wronged and injured one: though you must admit he does not complain. The question is—does Margaret see? Or has he brought her up in that world of imagination—careless of the real facts of life—persuading yourself of anything you wish to believe—thinking little of rent or butchers' bills so long as you can escape into the merry green-wood and live with Burd Helens and May Colleans and the like? You see, when I knew her she was little more than a child; it would never occur to her to question the conduct of her grandfather; but now you say she is a woman—she may have begun to look at things for herself——"

Mr. Thompson paused, and eyed his companion curiously. For a strange expression had come into Vincent's face.

"What then?" asked the banker.

"I am beginning to understand," the young man said, "and—and—perhaps here is the reason of Maisrie's going away. Suppose she imagined that I suspected her grandfather—suppose she thought I considered those reports true: then she might take that as a personal insult; she might be too proud to offer any defence; she would go to her grandfather and say 'Grandfather, if this is what he and his friends think of us, it is time we should take definite steps to end this companionship.' It has been all my doing, then, since I was so blind?" Vincent continued, evidently in deep distress. "I don't wonder that she was offended and insulted—and—and she would be too proud to explain. I have all along had a kind of notion that she had something to do, perhaps everything to do, with their going away. And yet——"

He was silent. Mr. Thompson waited for a second or two, not wishing to interrupt: then he said--

"Of course you know her better than I do; but that is not how I should read the situation. It is far more probable that her own eyes have been gradually opening—not to what her grandfather is, but to what he may appear to be in the eyes of the world; and when she has come more and more to perceive the little likelihood of his being considerably judged, she may have determined that you should be set free from all association with him and with her. I think that is far more likely, in view of the things you have told me. And I can imagine her doing that. A resolute young creature; ready to sacrifice herself; used to wandering, too—her first solution of any difficulty would be to 'go away.' A touch of pride, perhaps, as well. I dare say she has discovered that if you look at George Bethune through blue spectacles, his way of life must look rather questionable; but if you look at him through pink spectacles, everything is pleasant, and fine, and even grand. But would she ask anyone to put on a pair of pink spectacles? No; for she has the stiff neck of the Bethunes. I imagine she can hold her head as high as any one, now she is grown up. And of course she will not ask for generous interpretation; she will rather 'go away.'"

Vincent was still silent; but at length he said—as if speaking to himself—

"I wonder what Maisrie must have thought of me."

He had evidently been going over all that had happened in those bygone days—by the light of this new knowledge.

"What do you mean?" the banker said.

"Why, if there were any generous interpretation needed or expected, surely it should have come first of all from me. The outside world might be excused for thinking this or that of Mr. Bethune; but I was constantly with him; and then, look at the relations that existed between Maisrie and myself. I thought I was doing enough in the way of generosity when I tried to shut my eyes to certain things; whereas I should have tried to see more clearly. I might have understood—if any one. I remember now Maisrie's saying to me on one occasion—it was about that book on the Scottish-American poets—she said quite piteously: 'Don't you understand? Don't you understand that grandfather can persuade himself of anything? If he has thought a thing over, he considers it done, and is ready for something else.' And then there was another time——"

"Come, come," said Mr. Thompson, good-naturedly, "I don't

see you have much to reproach yourself with. You must admit that that affair—if he really did see the proof-sheets in New York—looked pretty bad. You say yourself that Hugh Anstruther was staggered by it——”

“Yes, he was,” said Vincent, “until I explained that the money had been repaid to Lord Musselburgh, and also that I had no doubt Mr. Bethune considered himself, from his knowledge of the subject, quite entitled to publish a volume on the other side of the water. Mr. Ross’s book was published only on this side—at least, that is my impression.”

“Did you tell Anstruther who repaid the money to Lord Musselburgh?” Mr. Thompson asked, with a shrewd glance.

“No,” answered Vincent, looking rather shame-faced.

“Ah, well,” the banker said, “a freak of generosity is very pardonable in a young man, especially where a young lady is concerned. And you had the means besides. Your father is a rich man, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yes, pretty well.”

“And you—now forgive my curiosity—it only arises from my interest in Margaret—I dare say you are allowed a sufficient income?”

“I have more money than I need,” said Vincent frankly, “but of course that would not be the case if I married Maisrie Bethune, for then I should have to depend on my own resources. I should have to earn my own living.”

“Oh, earn your own living? Well, that is very commendable, in any case. And how do you propose to earn your own living?”

“By writing for the newspapers.”

“Have you had any experience?” Maisrie’s ‘second father’ continued.

“Yes, a little; and I have had fair encouragement. Besides, I know one or two important people in the newspaper world.”

“And what about your seat in Parliament?”

“That would not interfere: there are several journalists in the House.”

The banker considered for a little while.

“Seems a little hazardous, doesn’t it, to break away from a certainty of income?” he asked, at length. “Are you quite convinced that if you married Margaret your relatives would prove so implacable?”

“It isn’t what they would do that is the question,” Vincent

responded, with promptitude. "It is what I should be inclined to do. At present they regard Maisrie as nothing more nor less than a common adventuress and swindler—or rather an uncommon one—a remarkably clever one. Now do you think I am going to take her by the hand, and lead her up to them, and say, 'Dear Papa,' or 'Dear Aunt,' as the case may be, 'Here is the adventuress and swindler whom I have married, but she is not going to be wicked any more; she is going to reform; and I beg you to receive her into the family, and forgive her all that she has been; and also I hope that you will give me money to support her and myself.' You see," continued Vincent, "before I did that I think I would rather try to find out how much a week I could make by writing leading-articles."

"Quite right—quite right," said Mr. Thompson, with a smile: for why this disdain?—*he* had not counselled the young man to debase himself so.

"And then it isn't breaking away from any certainty of income," Vincent proceeded, "but quite the reverse. The certainty is that as soon as I announce my intention of marrying Miss Bethune, my father will suggest that I should shift for myself. Very well. I'm not afraid. I can take my chance, like another. They say that poverty is a good test of affection: I am ready to face it, for one."

"Oh, as for that," the banker interposed, "I wish you to understand this—that your bride won't come to you empty-handed. George Bethune may hold aloof from me as long as he likes. If he thinks it is more dignified for him to go cadging about with vague literary projects—all for the honour and glory of Scotland, no doubt—instead of letting his oldest friend share his purse with him, I have nothing to say. My name's only Thompson; *noblesse oblige* has nothing to do with me. But when my little Margaret walks into church to meet the man of her choice, it will be my business to see that she is suitably provided for. I do not mean to boast, or make rash promises, or raise false expectations, but when her husband brings her away it will be no pauper he is taking home with him. And I want to add this, since we are talking in confidence: I hope her husband will be none other than yourself. I like you. I like the way you have spoken of both grandfather and granddaughter; and I like your independence. By all means when you get back to the old country: by all means carry out that project of yours of earning an income for yourself. It can do

you no harm, whatever happens; it may be invaluable to you in certain circumstances. And in the meantime, if I may still further advise, give up this search of yours for the present. I dare say you are now convinced they are not on this side the water; well, let that suffice for the time being. Here is Parliament coming together; you have your position to make; and the personal friend and protégé of — should surely have a great chance in public life. Of course, you will say it is easy to talk. But don't misunderstand me. What can you do except attend to these immediate and practical affairs? If George Bethune and Margaret have decided, for reasons best known to themselves, to sever the association between you and them, mere advertising won't bring them back. And searching the streets of this or that town is a pretty hopeless business. No; if you hear of them, it will not be in that way: it will be through some communication with some common friend, and just as likely as not that friend will be myself."

All this seemed very reasonable—and hopeless. Vincent rose.

"I must not keep you up too late," said he, in an absent sort of way. "I suppose you are right—I may as well go away back to England at once. But of course I will call to see you before I go—to-morrow if I may—to thank you for all your kindness."

"Ah, but you must keep up your heart, you know," the banker said, regarding the young man in a favouring way. "No despair. Why, I am sure to hear from one or other of them; they cannot guess that you have been here; even if they wish to keep their whereabouts concealed from you they would have no such secret from me. And be sure I will send you word the moment I hear anything. I presume the House of Commons will be your simplest and surest address."

As he walked away home that night Vincent had many things to ponder over; but the question of questions was as to whether Maisrie had indignantly scorned him for his blindness in not perceiving more clearly her grandfather's nature and circumstances, or for his supineness in wavering, and half-admitting that these charges might bring disquiet. For now the figure of old George Bethune seemed to stand out distinctly enough: an amiable and innocent monomaniac; a romantic enthusiast; a sublime egotist; a dreamer of dreams; a thaumaturgist surrounding himself with delusions and not knowing them to be such. And if Daniel Thompson's reading of the

character of his old friend was accurate—if George Bethune had merely in splendid excess that faculty of self-deception which in lesser measure was common to all mortals—who was going to cast the first stone?

CHAPTER XXII.

MARRIAGE NOT A LA MODE.

LONDON had come back to life again; the meeting of Parliament had summoned fathers of families from distant climes and cities—from Algiers and Athens, from Constantinople and Cairo; the light blazed at the summit of the Clock-tower; cabs and carriages rattled into Palace Yard. And here, at a table in the Ladies' Dining-room of the House of Commons, sate Mrs. Ellison and her friend Louie Drexel, along with Lord Musselburgh and Vincent Harris, the last-named playing the part of host. This Miss Drexel was rather an attractive-looking little person, brisk and trim and neat, with a healthy complexion, a pert nose, and the most astonishingly clear blue eyes. Very frank those eyes were; almost ruthless in a way; about as ruthless as the young lady's tongue, when she was heaping contempt and ridicule on some conventionality or social superstition. "Seeva the Destroyer" Vincent used gloomily to call her, when he got a little bit tired of having her flung at his head by the indefatigable young widow. Nevertheless she was a merry and vivacious companion; with plenty of independence, too: if she was being flung at anybody's head it was with no consent of her own.

"You don't say!" she was observing to her companion. "Fancy any one being in Canada in the winter and not going to see the night tobogganing at Rideau Hall!"

"I never was near Ottawa," said Vincent, in answer to her; "and, besides, I don't know the Viceroy."

"A member of the British Parliament—travelling in Canada: I don't think you would have to wait long for an invitation," said she. "Why, you missed the loveliest thing in the world—just the loveliest thing in the whole world!—the toboggan-

slide all lit up with Chinese lanterns—the black pine woods all around—the clear stars overhead. Then they have great bonfires down in the hollow—to keep the chapcrons from freezing: poor things, it isn't much fun for them; I dare say they find out what a good thing hot coffee is on a cold night. And you were at Toronto?" she added.

"Yes, I was at Toronto," he answered, absently: indeed at this time he was thinking much oftener of Toronto than this young lady could have imagined—wondering when, or if ever, a message was coming to him from the friendly Scotch banker there.

Mrs. Ellison was now up in town making preparations for her approaching marriage; but so anxious was she that Louie Drexel and Vincent should get thrown together, that she crushed the natural desire of a woman's heart for a fashionable wedding, and proposed that the ceremony should be quite a quiet little affair, to take place at Brighton, with Miss Drexel as her chief attendant and Vincent as best man. And of course there were many consultations; and Mrs. Ellison and her young friend were much together; and they seemed to think it pleasanter, in their comings and goings, to have a man's escort, so that the Parliamentary duties of the new member for Mendover were very considerably interfered with.

"Look here, aunt," said he, at this little dinner, "do you think I went into the House of Commons simply to get you places in the Ladies' gallery and entertain you in the Ladies' Dining-room?"

"I consider that a very important part of your duties," said the young widow, promptly. "And I tell you this: when we come back from the Riviera, for the London season, I hope to be kept informed of everything that is going on—surely, with a husband in one House and a nephew in the other!"

"But what I want to know is," said Lord Musselburgh on this same occasion, "what Vin is going to do about the taxation of ground rents. I think that is about the hardest luck I ever heard of. Here is a young man, who no sooner gets into Parliament than he is challenged to say whether he will support the taxation of ground rents; and lo and behold! every penny of his own fortune is invested in ground rents! Isn't that hard? Other things don't touch him. Welsh Disestablishment will neither put a penny in his pocket nor take one out; while he can make promises by the dozen about the abolition of the tea duty, extension of Factory Acts, triennial Parliaments, and all

the rest of it. Besides, it isn't only a question of money. He knows he has no more right to tax ground rents than to pillage a baker's shop; he knows he oughtn't to give the name of patriot to people who merely want to steal what doesn't belong to them; and I suppose he has his own ideas about contracts guaranteed by law, and the danger of introducing the legislation of plunder. But what is he going to do? What are you going to do, Marcus Curtius? Jump in, and sacrifice yourself, money and principles and all?"

"You are not one of my constituents," said Vincent, "and I decline to answer."

Day after day went by, and week after week; but no tidings came of the two fugitives. In such moments of interval as he could snatch from his various pursuits (for he was writing for an evening paper; now, and that occupied a good deal of his time) his imagination would go wandering away over the surface of the globe, endeavouring to picture them here or there. He had remembered Maisrie's injunction; he could not forget that; but of what avail was it now? Busy as he was, he led a solitary kind of life; much thinking, especially during the long hours of the night, was eating into his spirit; in vain did Mrs. Ellison scheme and plan all kinds of little festivities and engagements in order to get him interested in Louie Drexel. But he was grateful to the girl, in a sort of way; when they had to go two and two (which Mrs. Ellison endeavoured to manage whenever there was a chance) she did all the talking; she did not seem to expect attention; she was light-hearted and amusing enough. He bought her music; sent her flowers; and so forth; and no doubt Mrs. Ellison thought that all was going well; but it is to be presumed that Miss Drexel herself was under no misapprehension, for she was an observant and shrewd-witted lass. Once, indeed, as they were walking up Regent-street, she ventured to hint, in a sisterly sort of fashion, that he might be a little more confidential with her; but he did not respond to this invitation; and she did not pursue the subject further.

Then the momentous wedding-day drew near; and it was with curious feelings that Vincent found himself on the way to Brighton again. But he was not alone. The two Drexel girls and Lord Musselburgh were with him, in this afternoon Pullman; and Miss Louie was chattering away like twenty magpies. Always, too, in an oddly personal way. You—the person she was addressing—you were responsible for everything that had happened to her, or might happen to her, in this country; you

were responsible for the vagaries of the weather, for the condition of the cab that brought her, for the delay in getting tickets.

"Why," she said to Vincent, "you know perfectly well that all that your English poets have written about your English spring is a pure imposture. Who would go a-Maying when you can't be sure of the weather for ten minutes at a time? 'Hail, smiling morn!'—just you venture to say that, on the finest day you ever saw in an English spring; the chances are your prayer will be answered, and the chances are that the morn does begin to hail, like the very mischief. You know perfectly well that Herrick is a fraud. There never were such people as Corydon and Phyllis—with ribbons at their knees and in their caps. The farm-servants of Herrick's time were no better off than the farm-servants of this present time—stupid, ignorant louts, not thinking of poetry at all, but living the most dull and miserable of lives, with an occasional guzzle. But in this country, you believe anything that is told you. One of your great men says that machine-made things are bad; and so you go and print your books on hand-made paper—and worry yourselves to death before you can get the edges cut. I call the man who multiplies either useful or pretty things by machinery a true philanthropist; he is working for the mass of the people; and it's about time they were being considered. In former days——"

"Don't you want to hire a hall, Louie?" said her sister Anna.

"Oh, I've no patience with sham talk of that kind!" continued Miss Drexel, not heeding the interruption. "As I say, in former days no one was supposed to have anything fine or beautiful in their house, except princes and nobles. The goldsmiths, and the lapidaries, and the portrait-painters—and the poor wretches who made Venetian lace—they all worked for the princes and nobles; and the common people were not supposed to have anything to do with art or ornament; they could herd like pigs. Well, I'm for machinery. I'm for chromolithography, when it can give the labourer a very fair imitation of a Landseer or a Millais to hang up in his cottage; I'm for the sewing-machine that can give the £150-a-year people a very good substitute for Syrian embroidery to put in their drawing-room. You've been so long used to princes and nobles having everything and the poor people nothing——"

"But we're learning the error of our ways," said Vincent, interposing. "My father is a Socialist."

"A Socialist," observed Lord Musselburgh, "who broke the moulds of a dessert-service lest anybody else should have plates of the same pattern!"

"Who has been telling tales out of school?" Vincent asked; but the discussion had to end here, for they were now slowing into the station.

Nor did Mrs. Ellison's plans for throwing those two young people continuously and obviously together work any better in Brighton; for Vincent had no sooner got down than he went away by himself, seeking out the haunts he had known when Maisrie and her grandfather had been there. Wretchedness, loneliness, was destroying the nerve of this young man. He had black moods of despair; and not only of despair, but of remorse; he tortured himself with vain regrets, as one does when thinking of the dead. If only he could have all those opportunities over again, he would not misunderstand or mistrust! If only he could have them both here!—the resolute, brave-hearted old man who disregarded all mean and petty troubles while he could march along, with head erect, repeating to himself a verse of the Psalms of David, or perhaps in his careless gaiety singing a farewell to Bonny Mary and the pier o' Leith. And Maisrie?—but Maisrie had gone away, proud, and wounded, and indignant. She had found him unworthy of the love she had offered him. He had not risen to her height. She would seek some other, no doubt, better fitted to win her maiden trust. He thought of 'Urania'—

'Yet show her once, ye heavenly Powers,
One of some worthier race than ours!
One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.'

And that other one, that worthier one, she would welcome—

'And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry: *Long, long, I've looked for thee.*'

Then again his mood would change. If Maisrie were only here—if but for a second or so he could look into her clear, pensive, true eyes, surely he could convince her of one thing—that even when his father had offered him chapter and verse to prove that she was nothing but the accomplice of a common swindler, his faith in her had never wavered, never for an instant. And would she not forgive his blindness in not

understanding so complex a character as that of her grandfather? He had not told her of his half-suspicious; nay, he had treated those charges with an open contempt. And if her quick eyes had perceived that behind those professions there lingered some unconfessed doubt, would she not be generous and willing to pardon? It was in her nature to be generous. And he had borne some things for her sake that he had never revealed to any mortal.

He ought to have been attending to his groomsmen's duties, and acting as escort to the young ladies who had gone down; but instead of that he paid a visit to German-place, to look at the house in which the two Bethunes had lodged; and he slowly passed up and down the Kemp-Town breakwater, striving to picture to himself the look in Maisrie's eyes when her soul made confession; and he went to the end of the Chain Pier, to recall the tempestuous morning on which Maisrie, with her wet hair blown about by the winds, and her lips salt with the sea spray, had asked him to kiss her, as a last farewell. And his promise?—"Promise me, Vincent, that you will never doubt that you are my dearest in all the world; promise me that you will say to yourself always and always, 'Wherever Maisrie is at this moment, she loves me—she is thinking of me.'"

He had made light of her wild words; he could not believe in any farewell; and now—now all the wide unknown world lay between him and her, and there was nothing for him but the memory of her broken accents, her sobs, her distracted, appealing eyes.

Mrs. Ellison affected not to notice his remissness; nay, she went on the other tack.

"Don't you think it is a pity, Vin," she said on one occasion when she found him alone—and there was a demure little smile on her very pretty and expressive face: "Don't you think it is a pity the two marriages couldn't be on the same day?"

"What two marriages?" he demanded, with a stare.

"Oh, yes, we are so discreet!" she said mockingly. "We wouldn't mention anything for worlds. But other people aren't quite blind, young gentleman. And I do think it would have been so nice if the four of us could have gone off on this trip together; Louie despises conventions—she wouldn't mind. Many's the time I've thought of it; four make such a nice number for driving along the Riviera; and four who all know each other so well would be quite delightful. If it came to that, I dare say it could be arranged yet: I'm sure I should be

willing to have our marriage postponed for a month, and I have no doubt I could persuade Hubert to agree: then the two weddings on the same day would be jolly—”

“What are you talking about, aunt!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, well,” she said, with a wise and amiable discretion, “I don’t want to hurry on anything, or even to interfere. But of course we all expect that the attentions you have been paying to Louie Drexel will lead to something—and it would have been very nice if the two weddings could have been together.”

He was still staring at her.

“Mind you,” she went on, “I wish you distinctly to understand that Louie has not spoken a single word to me on the subject—”

“Well I should hope not!” said Vincent, with quick indignation.

“Oh, don’t be angry! Do you think a girl doesn’t interpret things?” continued Mrs. Ellison. “She has her own pride, of course; she wouldn’t speak until she is spoken to. But *I* can speak; and surely you know that it is only your interests I have at heart. And that is why we have been so glad to see this affair coming along—”

“Who have been glad to see it?” he asked again.

“Well, Hubert, for one. And I should think your father. Of course they must see how admirable a wife she would make you, now you are really embarked in public life. Clever, bright, amusing; of a good family; with a comfortable dowry, no doubt—but that would be of little consequence, so long as your father was pleased with the match: you will have plenty. And this is my offer, a very handsome one, I consider it: even now, at the last moment, I will try to get Hubert to postpone our marriage, if you and Louie will have your wedding on the same day with us. I have thought of it again and again; but somehow I didn’t like to speak. I was waiting for you to tell me that there was a definite understanding between you and Louie Drexel——”

“Well, there is not,” he said calmly. “Nor is there ever likely to be.”

“Oh, come, come,” she said insidiously, “don’t make any rash resolve, simply because I may have interfered a little too soon. Consider the circumstances. Did you ever hear of any young man getting into Parliament with fairer prospects than you? Your friendship with —— is of itself enough to attract attention to you. You have hardly opened your mouth in the

House yet; all the same, I can see a disposition on the part of the newspapers to pet you——”

“What has that got to do with Louie Drexel?” Vincent asked bluntly.

“Everything,” was the prompt reply. “You must have social position. You must begin and entertain—and make your own circle of friends and allies. Then I shall want you to come to Musselburgh House—you and your wife—so that my dinner parties shan’t be smothered up with elderly people and political bores. You can’t begin too early to form your own set; and not only that, but with a proper establishment and a wife at the head of it, you can pay compliments to all kinds of people, even amongst those who are not of your own set. Why shouldn’t you ask Mr. Ogden to dinner, for example?—there’s many a good turn he might do you in time to come. Wait till you see how I mean to manage at Musselburgh House—if only Hubert would be a little more serious, and profess political beliefs even if he hasn’t any. For I want you to succeed, Vincent. You are my boy. And you don’t know how a woman who can’t herself do anything distinguished is proud to look on and admire one of her own family distinguishing himself, and would like to have all the world admiring him too. I tell you you are losing time; you are losing your opportunities. What is the use—what on earth *can* be the use,” continued this zealous and surely disinterested counsellor, “of your writing for newspapers? If the articles were signed, then I could understand their doing you some good; or if you were the editor of an important journal, that would give you a position. But here you are slaving away—for what? Is it the money they give you? It would be odd if the son of Harland Harris had to make that a consideration. What otherwise, then? Do you think half-a-dozen people know that you write in the ——”

“My dear aunt,” he answered her, “all that you say is very wise and very kind: but you must not bother about me when your own affairs are so much more important. If I have been too attentive to Miss Drexel—I’m sure I wasn’t aware of it, but I may have been—I will alter that——”

“Oh, Vin, don’t be mean!” Mrs. Ellison cried. “Don’t do anything shabby. You won’t go and quarrel with the girl simply because I ventured to hope something from your manner towards her—you wouldn’t do such a thing as that——”

“Certainly not,” said he, in a half-amused way. “Miss Drexel and I are excellent friends——”

"And you will continue to be so!" said Mrs. Ellison, imploringly. "Now, Vincent, promise me! You know there are crises in a woman's life when she expects a little consideration—when she expects to be petted—and have things a little her own way: well, promise me now you will be very kind to Louie—kinder than ever—why, what an omen at a wedding it would be if my chief attendant and the groomsman were to fall out——"

"Oh, we shan't fall out, aunt, be sure of that," he said good-naturedly.

"Ah, but I want more," she persisted. "I shall consider myself a horrid mischief-maker if I don't see that you are more attentive and kind to Louie Drexel than ever. It's your duty. It's your place as groomsman. You'll have to propose their health at the wedding-breakfast; and of course you'll say something nice about American girls—could you say anything too nice, I wonder?—and you'll have to say it with an air of conviction. For they'll expect you to speak well, of course: you, a young member of Parliament; and where could you find a more welcome toast, at a wedding-breakfast, than the toast of the unmarried young ladies? Yes, yes; you'll have plenty of opportunity of lecturing a sleepy House of Commons about Leasehold Enfranchisement and things of that kind; but this is quite another sort of chance; and I'm looking forward to my nephew distinguishing himself—as he ought to do, when he will have Louie and Anna Drexel listening." And here this astute and insidious adviser ceased, for her future husband came into the room, to pay his last afternoon call.

Whether Vincent spoke well or ill on that auspicious occasion does not concern us here: it only needs to be said that the ceremony, and the quiet little festivities following, all passed off very satisfactorily; and that bride and bridegroom (the former being no novice) drove away radiant and happy, amid the usual symbolic showers. It was understood they were to break their journey southward at Paris for a few days; and Vincent—who had meanwhile slipped along to his hotel to change his attire—went up to the railway station to see them off. He was surprised to find both the Drexel girls there.

"Now, look here, Vin," said the charming, tall, pretty-eyed, and not inexperienced bride, "I want you to do me a favour. If a woman isn't to be humoured and petted on her wedding day—when, then? Well, Louie and Anna don't return to town till to-morrow morning; and what are they to

do in that empty house with old Mrs. Smythe? I want you to take them in hand for the afternoon—to please me. Leave that wretched House of Commons for one more evening; in any case you couldn't go up now before the five o'clock express."

And then she turned to the two young ladies. "Louie, Vincent has promised to look after you two girls; and he'll see you safely into your train to-morrow morning. So you must do your best to entertain him in the meanwhile; the afternoon will be the dulllest—you must find something to amuse yourselves with——"

Miss Drexel seemed a little self-conscious, and also inclined to laugh.

"If he will trust himself entirely to us," said she, with covertly merry eyes fixed on the bride, "Anna and I will do our best. But he must put himself entirely in our charge. He must be ruled and governed. He must do everything we ask——"

"Training him for a husband's duties," said Lord Musselburgh, without any evil intention whatever; for indeed he was more anxious about getting a supply of foot-warmers into the carriage that had been reserved for him.

Then the kissing had to be gone through; there were final farewells and good wishes; away went the train; there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs; and here was Vincent Harris, a captive in the hands of those two young American damsels—who, at first, did not seem to know what to do with him.

But very soon their shyness wore off; and it must be freely conceded that they treated him well. To begin with, they took him down into the town, and led him to a little table at a confectioner's, and ordered two ices for themselves and for him a glass of sherry and a biscuit. When that fluid was placed before him, he made no remark: his face was perfectly grave.

"What's the matter now?" Louie Drexel asked, looking at him.

"I said nothing," he answered.

"What are you thinking, then?"

"Nothing—nothing."

"But I insist on knowing."

"Oh, very well," he said. "But it isn't my fault. I promised to obey. If you ask me to drink a glass of confectioner's sherry I will do so—though it seems a pity to die so young."

"What would you rather have then—tea or an ice?"

She got an ice for him; and duly paid for the three—much to

his consternation, but he had undertaken to be quite submissive. Then they took him for a walk and showed him the beauties of the place, making believe to recognise the chief features and public buildings of New York. Then they carried him with them to Mrs. Ellison's house, and ascended into the drawing room there, chatting, laughing, nonsense-making, in a very frank and engaging manner. Finally, towards six o'clock, Miss Drexel rang the bell, and ordered the carriage.

"Oh, I say, don't do that," Vincent interposed, grown serious for a moment. "People don't like tricks being played with their horses. You may do anything else in a house but that."

"And pray who asked you to interfere?" she retorted, in a very imperious manner; so there was nothing for it but acquiescence and resignation.

And very soon—in a few minutes, indeed—the carriage was beneath the windows: coachman on the box, footman at the door, maidservant descending the steps with rugs, all in order. It did not occur to Vincent to ask how those horses came to be harnessed in so miraculously brief a space of time; he accepted anything that might befall; he was as clay in the hands of the potter. And really the two girls did their best to make things lively—as they drove away he knew not, and cared not, whither. The younger sister was rather more subdued, perhaps; but the elder fairly went daft, as the saying is; and her gaiety was catching. Not but that she could be dexterous in the midst of her madness. For example, she was making merry over the general inaptitude of Englishmen for speech-making; and was describing scenes she had herself witnessed in both Houses of Parliament, when she suddenly checked herself.

"At all events," she said, "I will say this for your House of Commons, that there are a number of very good-looking men in it. No one can deny that. But the House of Lords—whew! You know, my contention is that my pedigree is just as long as that of any of your lords; but I've got to admit that some of them more nearly resemble their ancestors—I mean their quadrumanous ancestors—"

"Louie!" said the sister, reprovingly.

And she was going on to say some very nice things about the House of Commons (as contrasted with the Upper Chamber) when Vincent happened to look out into the now gathering dusk.

"Why," said he, "we're at Rottingdean; and we're at the foot of an awfully steep hill; I must get out and walk up."

"No, no, no," said Miss Drexel, impatiently. "The horses have done nothing all day but hang about the church door. You English are so absurdly careful of your horses: more careful of them than of yourselves—as I've noticed myself at country houses in wet weather. I wonder, when I get back home, if the people will believe me when I tell them that I've actually seen horses in England with leather shoes over their feet to keep the poor things warm and comfortable. Yes, in this very town of Brighton—"

But here Miss Louie had the laugh turned against her, when he had gravely to inform her that horses in England wore overshoes of leather, not to keep their feet warm, but to prevent their cutting the turf when hauling a lawn-roller.

"But where *are* we going?" said he again.

"Oh, never mind," she answered, pertly.

"All right—all right," he said, and he proceeded to ensconce himself still more snugly in the back seat. "Well, now, since you've told us of all the absurd and ludicrous things you've seen in England, won't you tell us of some of the things you have admired? We can't be insane on every point, surely."

"I know what you think I am," she said of a sudden. "A comparison-monger."

"You were born in America," he observed.

"And you despise people who haven't the self-sufficiency, the stolid satisfaction, of the English."

"We don't like people who are too eager to assert themselves—who are always beating drums and tom-toms—quiet folk would rather turn aside, and give them the highway."

"But all the same, you know," Miss Drexel proceeded, "some of your countrymen have been very complimentary when they were over with us: of course you've heard of the one who said that the biggest things he had seen in America were the eyes of the women?"

"What else could he say?—an Englishman prides himself on speaking the truth," he made answer, very properly.

By this time, however, he was beginning seriously to ask himself whither those two young minxes meant to take him—a runaway expedition carried out with somebody else's horses! At all events they were going to have a fine night for it. For by now it ought to have been quite dark; but it was not dark: the long-rolling downs, the wide strip of turf along the top of the cliffs, and the far plain of the sea were all spectrally visible in a sort of grey uncertainty; and he judged that the moon was

rising, or had risen in the east. What did Charles and Thomas, seated on the box, think of this pretty escapade? In any case, his own part and lot in the matter had already been decided: unquestioning obedience was what had been demanded of him. It could not be that Gretna Green was the objective point?—this was hardly the way.

At last they descended from those grey moonlit solitudes, and got down into a dusky valley, where there were scattered yellow lights—lamp lights and lights of windows. “This is Newhaven,” he thought to himself; but he did not say anything; for Miss Drexel was telling of a wild midnight frolic she and some of her friends had had on Lake Champlain. Presently the footfalls of the horses sounded hollow; they were going over a wooden bridge. Then they proceeded cautiously for a space, and there was a jerk or two; they were crossing a railway line. And now Vincent seemed to understand what those mad young wretches were after. They were going down to the Newhaven Pier Hotel. To dine there? Very well; but he would insist on being host. It was novel, and odd, and in a certain way fascinating, for him to sit in a restaurant and find himself entertained by two young ladies—find them pressing another biscuit on him, and then paying the bill, but, of course, the serious business of dinner demanded the intervention of a man.

What followed speedily drove these considerations out of his head. The enterprising young damsels having told the coachman when to return with the carriage, conducted their guest to the hotel, and asked for the coffee-room. A waiter opened the door for them. The next thing that Vincent saw was that, right up at the end of the long room, Lord Musselburgh and his bride were seated at a side table, and that they were regarding the new comers—especially himself—with some little amusement. They themselves were in no wise disconcerted, as they ought to have been.

“Come along!” the bridegroom said, rather impatiently. “You’re nearly half-an-hour late, and we’re famishing. Here, waiter, dinner at once, please! Vin, my boy, you sit next Miss Drexel—that’s all right!”

At this side-table, covers were already laid for five. As Vincent took his place, he said:—

“Well, this is better than being had up before a magistrate for stealing a carriage and a pair of horses!”

“Sure they didn’t let on?” the bride demanded, with a glance at the two girls.

"Not a word?" he protested. "I had not the remotest idea where or what we were bound for. Looked more like Gretna Green than anything else."

"The nearest way to Gretna Green," said she, regarding Vincent with significant eyes, "is through Paris—to the British Embassy."

Now although this remark (which Miss Drexel affected not to hear—she was so busy taking off her gloves) seemed a quite haphazard and casual thing, it very soon appeared, during the progress of this exceedingly merry dinner, that Lady Musselburgh, as she now was, had been wondering whether they might not carry the frolic a bit further; whether, in short, this little party of five might not go on to Paris together by the eleven o'clock boat the same night.

"Why, Louie, you despise conventionalities," she exclaimed. "Well, now is your chance!"

Miss Louie pretended to be much frightened.

"Oh, but I couldn't do that!" she cried. "Neither Nan nor I have any things with us."

"The idea of American girls talking of taking things with them to Paris!" the bride said, with a laugh. "That is the very reason you should go to Paris—to get the things."

"Do you really mean to cross to-night?" Vincent asked, turning to Musselburgh.

"Oh, yes, certainly. The fixed service—eleven o'clock—so there's no hurry, whatever you decide on."

For he, too, seemed rather taken with this audacious project; said he thought it would be good fun; pleasant company, and all that; also he darkly hinted—perhaps for the benefit of the American young ladies—that Paris had been altogether too pallid of late, and wanted a little crimson added to its complexion. And indeed as the little banquet proceeded, these intrepid schemes widened out, in a half-jocular way. Why should the runaway party stop at Paris? Why should they not all go on to the Mediterranean together, to breathe the sweet airs blown in from the sea, and watch the Spring emptying her lavish lap-full of flowers over the land? Alas! it fell to Vincent's lot to demolish these fairy-like dreams. He said he would willingly wait to see the recruited party off by that night's steamer; and would send any telegrams for them, or deliver any messages; but he had to return to London the next morning, without fail. And then Miss Louie Drexel said it was a pity to spoil a pleasant evening by talking of impossibilities;

and that they had already sufficiently outraged conventionalities by running away with a carriage and pair and breaking in upon a wedding tour. So the complaisant young bride had for the moment to abandon her half-serious, half-whimsical designs ; and perhaps she even hoped that Miss Drexel had not overheard her suggested comparison between the British Embassy at Paris and Gretna Green.

At nine o'clock the carriage came round, and at nine o'clock the younger people, having got their good-byes said all over again, set out for home.

"I suppose we ought to keep this little expedition a secret," said Vincent, as they were climbing up from the dusky valley to the moonlight above, which was now very clear and white.

"Why?" said Miss Louie.

"Rather unusual— isn't it?" he asked, doubtfully, for he knew little of such matters.

"That's what made it so nice," she answered, promptly. "Don't you think they were charmed? Fancy their being quite alone in that big hotel, waiting for a steamer! We had it all planned out days ago. Didn't you suspect in the least— when you knew they were going by Newhaven and Dieppe, and that they will have to wait till eleven to-night? I'm sure they would have been delighted if we had gone over to Paris with them, and down to the Mediterranean: but I suppose that would have been a little too much—just a little too much!"

And if Miss Drexel was vivacious and talkative on her way out, she was equally so on the way back; so that Vincent, in such cheerful company, had little reason to regret their having captured and run away with him. Then again the night was surpassingly beautiful—the moonlight grey on the land and white on the sea; the heavens cloudless; the world everywhere apparently silent and asleep. Not that they were to get all the way home without a little bit of an adventure, however. When they reached the top of the height just west of Rottingdean, Louie Drexel proposed that they should get out and walk along the cliff for a while, leaving the carriage to go slowly on by road. This they accordingly did; and very soon the carriage was out of sight; for at this point the highway is formed by a deep cutting in the chalk. It was pleasant to be by themselves on such a night—high up on this lofty cliff, overlooking the wide, far-shimmering, silver sea.

Presently there came into the stillness a sound of distant voices; and shortly afterwards, at the crest of the hill, a band

of strayed revellers appeared in sight, swaying much in their walk, and singing diverse choruses with energy rather than with skill. They were in high good humour, all of them. As they drew near, Vincent perceived that one of them was a soldier; and he seemed the centre of attraction; this one and that clung to his arm, until their legs, becoming involved, carried them wide away, when two other members of the group would occupy the twin places of honour. The soldier was drunk, too; but he had the honour of the flag to maintain; and made some heroic effort to march straight.

Now what with their insensate howling and staggering, they were almost on Vincent and his two companions before they were aware; but instantly there was a profusion of offers of hospitality. The gentleman must drink with them, at the Royal Oak. The gentleman declined to drink, and civilly bade them good-night. At the same moment another member of the jovial crew appeared to have discovered that there were also two young ladies here; most probably he had a dim suspicion there might only be one; however, it was this one, the one nearest, he insisted should also go down and have a glass at the Royal Oak. It was all done in good fellowship, with no harm meant; but when at the same time this particular roysterer declared he would have his sweetheart come along o' him, and caught Miss Louie by the arm, he had distinctly overstept the bounds of prudence.

"Hands off!" said Vincent, and he slung the fellow a clip on the ear that sent him staggering, until his legs got mixed up somehow, and away he went headlong on to the grass.

Then he said in a rapid undertone to the two girls—

"Off you go to the carriage—quick!"

He turned to the now murmuring group.

"What do you want?" he said. "I can't fight all of you: I'll fight the soldier—make a ring, to see fair play——"

He glanced over his shoulder: the two girls had disappeared: now he breathed freely.

"But, look here," said he, in a most amicable tone, "you've had a glass—any one can see that—and it's no use a man trying to fight if he's a bit unsteady on his pins; you know that quite well. And I don't want to fight any of you. If you ask me in a friendly way, I'll go down to the Royal Oak and have something with you; or I'll treat you, if you like that better. I call that fair."

And they seemed to think it fair, too; so they picked up

their companion (who looked drowsy) and helped him along. But they hadn't gone half-a-dozen yards when two dark figures appeared at the top of the chalk cutting; and these, when they came quickly up, Vincent to his surprise discovered to be the coachman and footman.

"Where are the young ladies?" he demanded, instantly and angrily.

"Miss Drexel is on the box, sir—she sent us to you," said the coachman—staring with amazement at the revellers, and no doubt wondering when the fighting was about to begin.

"Oh, go away back!" said he. "Get the ladies into the carriage and drive them home! I'm going to have a drink with these good fellows—I'll follow on foot!"

"I'm quite sure, sir, Miss Drexel won't go," said the coachman.

But here the soldier stepped forward. He had arrived at some nebulous perception of the predicament; and he constituted himself spokesman of the party. They had no wish to inconvenience the gentleman. He hoped some other night—proud to see such a gentleman—wouldn't interfere with ladies—not interfere with anybody—all gentlemen and good friends—no use in animosity—no offence meant—no offence taken—

This harangue might have gone on all night had not Vincent cut it short by requesting to be allowed to hand his friends five shillings to drink his health withal; and away the jocund brethren went to obtain more liquor—if haply they could induce the landlord of the Royal Oak to serve them.

And here, sure enough, was Miss Louie Drexel seated sedately on the box, whip and reins in hand; and there was Miss Anna, in the white moonlight, at the horses' heads. When Vincent and his two companions were in the carriage again, he said to the elder of them—

"Why didn't you drive away home?"

"Drive away home?" said she, with some touch of vibrant indignation in her voice. "And leave you there? I was just as near as possible going back myself, with the whip in my hand. Do you think I couldn't have lashed my way through those drunken fools?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SPLIT AT LAST.

THE renovation of Musselburgh House took more time than had been hoped; bride and bridegroom remained abroad, basking in the sweet airs and sunlight of the Mediterranean spring; and it was not until well on in the month of May that they returned to London. Immediately after their arrival Vincent called on them—one afternoon on his way down to St. Stephen's. He stayed only a few minutes; and had little to say. But the moment he had left Lady Musselburgh turned to her husband.

"Oh, Hubert, isn't it dreadful! Did you ever see such a change in any human being? And no one to tell us of it—not even his own father—nor a word from Louie Drexel, though she wrote often enough about him and what he was doing in the House——"

"Yes, he does look ill," said Lord Musselburgh, with a seriousness not usual with him. "Very ill indeed. Yet he doesn't seem to know it—declares there is nothing the matter with him—shows a little impatience, even, when you begin to ask questions. I suppose he has been working too hard; too eager and anxious all the way round; too ambitious—not like most young men. He'd better give up that newspaper-nonsense, for one thing."

"Oh, it isn't that, Hubert; it isn't that!" she exclaimed, in rather piteous accents; and she walked away to the window (this was the very room in which Vincent had first set eyes on Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather).

She stood there, alone, for a time. Then her husband went and joined her, and linked his arm within hers. She was crying a little.

"I did it for the best, Hubert," she sobbed.

"Did what for the best?"

"Getting that girl away. I never thought it would come to this."

"Now, now, Madge," said he, in a very affectionate fashion, "don't you worry about nothing—or rather, it isn't nothing, for Vin does look pretty seedy; but you mustn't assume that

you are in any way responsible. People don't die nowadays of separation and a broken heart—not nowadays. He is fagged; he is not used to the late hours of the House of Commons; then there's that newspaper work——”

“But his manner, Hubert, his manner!” she exclaimed. “He seemed as if he no longer cared for anything in life; he hardly listened when I told him where we had been; he appeared to be thinking of something quite different—as if he were looking at ghosts.”

“And perhaps he was looking at ghosts,” said her husband. “For it was by that table there he first saw those two people who have made all this trouble. But why should you consider yourself responsible, Madge? It wasn't your money that sent them out of the country. It wasn't you who found out what they really were.”

She passed her handkerchief across her eyes.

“I was quite sure,” she went on—not heeding this consolation—“that as soon as she was got away—as soon as he was removed from the fascination of her actual presence—he would begin to see things in their true light. And then, thrown into the society of a charming and clever girl like Louie Drexel, I hoped everything for him. And is this all that has come of it, that he looks as if he were at death's door? It isn't the House of Commons, Hubert; and it isn't the newspaper-work: it is simply that he still believes in that girl, and that he is eating his heart out about her absence, and has no one to confide in. For that is the worst of it all: it is all a sealed book now, as between him and us. He was for leaving my house in Brighton—oh, the rage he was in with me about her!—and it would have been for the last time too, I know; only that I promised never again to mention the subject to him, and on that condition we have got on fairly well since. But how am I to keep silence any longer? I cannot see my boy like that. I must speak to him; I must ask him if he is still so mad as to believe in the honesty of those two people; and then if I find that his infatuation still exists, even after all this time, then I must simply tell him that they took money to go away. How can he get over that? How *can* he get over that, Hubert?”

In her despair, this was almost a challenge as well as an appeal. But her husband was doubtful.

“When a man is in love with a woman,” said he, “he can forgive a good lot—confound it, he can forgive everything, or nearly everything, so long as she can persuade him she loves him in return——”

"But not this, Hubert, not this!" the young wife exclaimed. "Even if he could forgive her being a thief and the accomplice of an old charlatan and swindler—and what an 'if'!—imagine that of Vincent—of Vincent, who is as proud as Lucifer—imagine that of him!—but even if he were willing to forgive all that, how could he forgive her being bought over, her taking money to remain away from him? No, no, Hubert: surely there is a limit, even to a young man's folly!"

"Of course you know best," her husband said in a dubious kind of way. "I've seen some queer things in my time, with young men. And Vin is an obstinate devil, and tenacious: he sticks to anything he takes up: look at him and that wretched newspaper-work, for example. If he has persuaded himself of the innocence and honour of this girl, it may be hard to move him. And I remember there was something very winning and attractive about her—something that bespoke favour——"

"That was what made her so useful to that old impostor!" Lady Musselburgh said, vindictively.

"Of course," he admitted, "as you say, here is the undoubted fact of their taking the money. If Vin is to be convinced at all, it is possible that may convince him."

"Very well, then," said she, with decision, "he must and shall be convinced; and that no further off than to-morrow morning. I'll tell Harland I'm coming along to lunch; so that he may be in the house, to give me any papers I may want. And surely, surely, when Vincent perceives what these people are, and what an escape he has had, he will cease to mope and fret: at his time of life there ought to be other things to think of than a girl who has deceived him all the way through, and ended by taking money to leave the country!"

But notwithstanding all this brave confidence, Lady Musselburgh felt very nervous and anxious as she went down next morning to Grosvenor Place. She was alone—her husband was coming along later, for lunch; and she went on foot, to give her a little more time to arrange her plan of procedure. For this was her last bolt, and she knew it. If his fatal obstinacy withstood this final assault, then there was no hope for him, or for her far-reaching schemes with regard to him.

She went into the drawing-room; and he came as soon as he was sent for. These two were now alone.

"Do you know, Vin," she began at once, "Hubert and I have been much concerned about you; for though you won't admit there is anything the matter, the change in your appearance

struck us yesterday the moment you came in: indeed, it made me quite anxious; and after you were gone, Hubert and I talked a little about you and your affairs—you may be sure with only the one wish in our minds. Hubert thinks you are over-fagged; that you are too close in your attendance at the House; and that you should give up your newspaper-writing for a time. I wish it were no more than that. But I suspect there is something else——”

“Aunt,” said he, interrupting her—and yet with something of a tired air, “do you think there is any use in talking, and inquiring, and suggesting? What has happened, has happened. It is something you don’t understand; and something you couldn’t put right—with all your good wishes.”

“Yes, yes,” she said eagerly, for she was rejoiced to find that he took her interference so amiably: “that is quite right; and mind you, I don’t forget the agreement we came to at Brighton, that a certain subject should never be referred to by either of us. I quite remember that; and you know I have never sought to return to it again in any way whatever. But your looks yesterday, Vin, frightened me; and at this moment—why, you are not like my dear boy at all. I wish in all seriousness you had come over to Paris with us—you and Louie—and gone with us to the Mediterranean; we should not have allowed you to fall into this condition——”

“Oh, I’m well enough, aunt!” said he.

“You are not well!” she insisted. “And why? Because your mind is ill at ease——”

“And very little comfort I have to hope for from you,” said he, remembering former conversations: but there was no bitterness in his tone—only a sort of resigned hopelessness.

“Now, that is not fair, Vin!” she protested. “If I said things to you you did not like, what motive had I but your happiness? And now, at this moment, if I re-open that subject, it is not the kind of comfort you apparently hope for that I am prepared to bring you, but something quite different. I should like to heal your mental ailment, once and for all, by convincing you of the truth.”

“Yes, I think we have heard something of that sort on previous occasions,” he said, rather scornfully. “The truth as it is in George Morris! Well, I will tell you what would be more useful, more to the point, and more becoming. Before saying anything further about that old man and his grand-

daughter, I think you ought to go and seek them out, and go down on your knees to them, and ask their pardon—”

“For what?”

“For what you have already said of them—and suspected.”

“Really you try my patience too much!” she exclaimed, with some show of temper. “What have I said or suspected of them that was not amply justified by the account of them that your father offered to show you? Of course you wouldn’t look at it. Certainly not! Facts are inconvenient things, most uncomfortable things, where one’s prepossessions are involved. But *I* had no objection to looking at it—”

“I suppose not!” said he.

“And my eyes were not blinded: I could accept evidence when it was put before me.”

“Evidence!” he repeated. “You forget that I have been across the Atlantic since that precious document was compiled. I heard how that evidence had been got: I could see how it could be perverted to suit the malignant theories of a pack of detectives. And if I came back with any settled conviction, it was that you and one or two others—myself, too, in a way—could do no better than go and humble ourselves before that old man and that girl, and beg for their forgiveness, and their forgetfulness of the wrongs and insults we have put upon them.”

“Oh, this is beyond anything!” she cried—rather losing command of herself. “You drive me to speak plain. Everything your father and I could think of was tried to cure you of this mad infatuation—the most patient inquiry—expenditure of money—representations that would have convinced any sane person. Nothing was of any use. What was to be done next? Well, we could only buy up those honourable persons—who were not adventurers in any kind of way—oh, certainly not!—but all the same they were willing to be bought; and so, on payment of a substantial consideration, they agreed to pack up their traps and be off. What do you think of that? What do you say to that? Where was the old gentleman’s indomitable pride?—where was the girl’s pretended affection for you?—when they consented to take a good round sum of money and be off? How can you explain that away?”

She regarded him with a certain defiance—for she was moved to anger by his obduracy. But if she expected him to wince under this sudden stab she was mistaken.

“How do I know that this is true?” he said calmly.

"I am not in the habit of speaking untruths," she said, slightly drawing herself up.

"Oh, of course not," he answered. "But all through this matter there has been a good deal of twisting about and misrepresentation. I should like to know from whom Mr. Bethune got this money—and in what form."

Well, she was prepared.

"I suppose you would be convinced," said she, "if I showed you the receipt—a receipt for £5,000—which he signed and gave to George Morris?"

"Where is that receipt?" he asked.

"In this house. I will go to your father, and get it. Shall I ask him at the same time for those other documents which you would not read? Perhaps all taken together they might enable you to realise the truth at last."

"No, thank you," said he, coldly. "I know how those other documents were procured. I shall be glad to see the receipt."

She hurried away, anxious to strike while the iron was hot, and certain she had already made a profound impression. And so she had, in one way, all unknowing. When she left the room, he remained standing, gazing blankly at the sides of the books on the table: outwardly impassive, but with his brain working rapidly enough. He made no manner of doubt that she could produce this receipt. He took it for granted that George Bethune had accepted the money. Of course, Maisrie had nothing to do with it; her grandfather kept her in ignorance of his pecuniary affairs; and it would be enough for him to say that she must go away with him from England—she was obedient in all things. And no doubt the old man had been cajoled and flattered into believing he was acting justly and in the best interests of every one concerned; there could have been little difficulty about that; he was quick to persuade himself of anything that happened to fall in with the needs of the moment. All this Vincent understood at once. But when he came to consider that it was his own relatives who had brought upon him all the long torture and suffering of these bygone months—and not only that: for what was he or his hidden pain?—but also that they had once more driven forth those two tired wanderers—the old man who had some wistful notion of ending his days in his own country, the young girl whose maiden eyes had just made confession of her love-secret—then his heart grew hot within him. It was too cruel.

When Lady Musselburgh returned with the receipt in her hand, he took the paper, and merely glanced at it.

"And whose clever and original idea was this?" he demanded—with what she took to be indifference.

"But, Vincent—are you convinced at last!" she exclaimed. "Surely you must see for yourself now. You will give up thinking of them—thinking of that girl especially when you see what she is——"

"Whose idea was it to get them sent away?" he repeated.

"Well, it was my idea," she said; "but your father paid the money."

He was silent for a second or two, and then he said slowly——

"And you are my nearest relatives; and this is what you have done, not to me only, but to one who is dearer to me than life. So be it. But you cannot expect me to remain longer under this roof, or to sit down at table, anywhere, with my cruellest enemies——"

She turned very pale.

"Vincent!" she exclaimed.

"It is a question of taking sides," he went on, with perfect composure; "and I go over to the other side. They most need help: they are poor and friendless. I hope the mischief you have done is not irreparable; I cannot tell; but I dare say when you and I meet again time will have shown."

She was thunderstruck and stupefied; she did not even seek to detain him as he left the room. For there was a curious air of self-possession, of resolution, about his manner: this was no pique of disappointed passion, nor any freak of temper. And she could not but ask herself, in a breathless sort of way, whether after all he might not be in the right about those people; and, in that case, what was this that she had brought about? She was frightened—too frightened to reason with herself, perhaps; she only saw Vincent leaving his father's roof—cutting himself off from his own family—and she had a dumb consciousness that it was her work, through some fatal error of judgment. And she seemed to know instinctively that this step that he had taken was irrevocable—and that she was in some dim way responsible for all that had occurred.

When Lord Musselburgh arrived, he and Harland Harris came upstairs together; and almost directly afterwards luncheon was announced. As they were about to go down to the dining-room the great Communist-capitalist looked round with a little air of impatience and said—

"But where is Vin?"

"He was here a short time ago," said Lady Musselburgh: she dared not say more.

Mr. Harris, from below, sent a message to his son's room: the answer—which Lady Musselburgh heard in silence—was that they were not to wait luncheon for him.

"Too busy with his reply to the *Sentinel*," Musselburgh suggested. "Sharp cuts and thrusts going. I wonder that celestial minds should grow so acrid over such a subject as the nationalisation of tithe."

There was some scuffle on the stairs outside, to which nobody (except Lady Musselburgh, whose ears were painfully on the alert) paid any attention; but when a hansom was called up to the front door, Harland Harris happened to look out.

"What, is he going off somewhere? I never knew any creature so careless about his meals. I presume his indifference means a good digestion."

"Oh, Vin's digestion is all right," Lord Musselburgh said. "I hear he dines every night at the House of Commons—and yet he is alive——"

"But there are his portmanteaus!" Mr. Harris exclaimed, and he even rose and went to the window for a second. Well, he was just in time to see Vincent step into the cab, and drive off; and therewith he returned to his place at table, and proceeded, in his usual bland and somewhat patronising manner, to tell Lord Musselburgh of certain experiments he was having made in copper-lustre. He was not in the least concerned about that departing cab; nor did he know that that was the last glimpse of his son he was to have for many and many a day.

And meanwhile Lady Musselburgh sate there frightened, and guilty, and silent. And that without reason; for what she had done she had done with the full concurrence and approval of her brother-in-law and her *fiancé* (as he then was). Yet somehow she seemed to feel herself entirely answerable for all that had happened—for the failure of all her schemes—for the catastrophe that had resulted. And the moment she got outside her brother-in-law's house, she began and confessed the whole truth to her husband.

"But why didn't you tell Harris?" said he, pausing as if even now he would go back.

"Oh, I couldn't, Hubert; I daren't!" she said, evidently in

great distress. "I was so confident everything would come right—I advised him—I persuaded him to pay the £5,000——"

"Oh, nonsense!" was the impatient reply. "A man doesn't hand over £5,000 unless he is himself convinced that it is worth while. And he got what he bargained for. Those people have gone away; they don't interfere any more——"

"Ah, but that is not all," Lady Musselburgh put in, rather sadly. "I made so sure that Vin would forget—that as soon as the hallucination had worn off a little, he would see what those people really were, and turn his eyes elsewhere: yet apparently he believes in their honesty more firmly than ever—talks of my going and asking their pardon—and the like; and now he has wholly broken away from us—declares he will never be under the same roof with us, or sit down at the same table with us. He has gone over to the other side, he says, because they are poor and friendless. Poor and friendless!" she repeated, with a snap of anger—"living on the fat of the land through their thieving! And yet——" And here again she paused, as if recalling something to herself: "Do you know, Hubert, I was startled and frightened by Vin's manner to-day; for I had suddenly to ask myself whether after all it was possible he might be in the right, and we altogether wrong. In all other things he shows himself so clear-headed and able and shrewd; and then he has seen the world; you would not take him to be one who could be easily deceived. Sometimes I hardly know what to think. But at all events, this is what you must do now, Hubert: you must get hold of him, and persuade him to go back home, before Harland knows anything of what had been intended. He can invent some excuse about the port-manteaus. You can go down to the House to-night, and see him there; and if you persuade him to return to Grosvenor Place, that will be so much of the mischief set straight. That is the first thing to be done; but afterwards——"

It was quite clear that she knew not what to think, for she went on again, almost as if talking to herself—

"Of course, if the girl were a perfectly good and honest girl, and above suspicion of every kind, Vin's constancy and devotion to her would be a very fine and noble thing; and I for one should be proud of him for it. But as things are, it is a monomania—nothing else than a monomania! He must see that she is in league with that old man to get money on false pretences."

"He sees nothing of the kind," said her husband bluntly.

"She may or she may not be; I know little or nothing about her; but if she is, Vin doesn't see it; you may make up your mind about that."

"And yet he seems sharp-sighted in other things," said Lady Musselburgh in a pensive sort of way; and then she added: "However, the first step to be taken is to get him back to his own family; and none can do that so well as you, Hubert; you are his old friend; and you stand between us, as it were. And there's one thing about Vin: *he* can't disappear out of the way; you can always get hold of him—at the House of Commons."

Lord Musselburgh had not been long married; he did as he was bid. And very eagerly did Vincent welcome this ambassador, when he encountered him in the Lobby.

"Come out on to the Terrace. I was just going to write to you: I want you to do me the greatest service you can imagine!"

"Here I am, ready to do anybody any number of services," said Lord Musselburgh, as they proceeded to stroll up and down this dark space, with the wide river flowing silently by, and the innumerable small beads of gold showing where London lay in the dusk. "Only too happy. And I am in the best position for being mediator, for I have nothing to gain from either side—except, of course that I should be extremely sorry to see you quarrelling with your relations. This is always a mistake, Vin, my boy: bad for you, bad for them. And I hope you will let me go back with the important part of my commission done—that is to say, I was to persuade you to return to Grosvenor Place, just as if nothing had happened. My wife is awfully upset about it—thinks it is entirely owing to her; whereas I don't see that it is at all. She has been trying to do her best for everybody—for your father as well as for yourself. And the notion that you should cut yourself off from your family naturally seems very dreadful to her; and if I can take her the assurance that you don't mean anything of the kind—very well!"

"Oh, but look here, Musselburgh," said Vincent, "you entirely mistake. It was not about that I wished to see you: not at all: on that point it is useless saying anything. You must assure Lady Musselburgh that this is no piece of temper on my part—nothing to be smoothed over, and hushed up. I have seen all along that it was inevitable. From the moment that my aunt and my father took up that position against—

against Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather—I foresaw that sooner or later this must come. I have tried to reason with them; I have assured them that their suspicions and their definite charges were as cruel as they were false; and all to no purpose. And this last thing: this bribing of an old man, who can be too easily persuaded, to take his granddaughter away with him and subject her to the homeless life she had led for so many years—perhaps there are some other considerations I need not mention—this is too much. But I knew that sooner or later a severance would come between them and me; and I am not unprepared. You wondered at my drudging away at that newspaper-work, when my father was allowing me a handsome income. Now do you see the use of it? I am independent. I can do as I please. I can't make a fortune; but I can earn enough to live—and something more. Let them go their way, as I go mine; it has not been all my doing."

Lord Musselburgh was disconcerted; but he was a dutiful husband; he went on to argue. He found he might as well attempt to argue with a milestone. - Nothing could shake this young man's determination.

"I told Lady Musselburgh I had gone over to the other side, this time for good," said he. "We are in opposite camps now. We have been so all along—but not openly. This piece of treachery has been too much for me: we are better apart: I could not sit down at table with people who had acted like that—whatever their motives were. But you, Musselburgh, you were not concerned in that wretched piece of scheming; and as I tell you, you can do me the greatest possible service. Will you do it? Or will you rather cast in your lot with them?"

"Oh, well," said Musselburgh, rather disappointedly, "I don't see why I should be compelled to take sides. I want to do my best for everybody concerned. I've just come into the family, as you might say; and it seems a pity there should be any quarrel or break up. I had a kind of notion that we should all of us—but particularly my wife and myself and you and—and—your wife—I thought our little party of four might have a very pleasant time together, both at home and abroad. My wife and I have often talked of it, and amused ourselves with sketching out plans. Seems such a pity——"

"Yes," said Vincent abruptly, "but there are other things in life besides going to Monte Carlo and staking five-franc pieces."

"What is this that you want me to do?" his friend asked next—seeing that those inducements did not avail.

"Well," said Vincent, "I suppose you know that Lady Musselburgh showed me this morning the receipt Mr. Bethune gave George Morris for the £5,000. It was a simple receipt: nothing more. But everybody knows George Morris is not the man to part with money unconditionally; there must have been arrangements and pledges; and I want to discover what Mr. Bethune undertook to do, where he undertook to go. Morris won't tell me, that is certain enough: but he would probably tell you."

Lord Musselburgh hesitated.

"Why," said he, "you know why that money was paid. It was paid for the express purpose of getting them away—so that you should not know where they are——"

"Precisely so," said Vincent. "And you would therefore be undoing a part of the wrong that has been done them, by your wife and my father."

"Oh, I don't call it doing a wrong to a man to give him £5,000," said Lord Musselburgh, with a touch of resentment. "He needn't have taken the money unless he liked."

"Do you know what representations were made to him to induce him to take it?" Vincent said.

"Well, I don't," was the reply. "They settled all that amongst themselves; and I was merely made acquainted with the results. It would hardly have been my place to interfere, you see; it was before my marriage, remember; in any case, I don't know that I should have wanted to have any say in the matter. However, the actual outcome we all of us know; and you must confess, Vin, whatever persuasions were used, it looks a rather shady transaction."

"Yes—on the part of those who induced him to accept the bribe?" Vincent said, boldly.

"Oh, come, come," Lord Musselburgh interposed, rather testily, "don't be so bigoted. It isn't only your considering that girl to be everything that is fine and wonderful—I can understand that—the glamour of love can do anything; but you go too far in professing the greatest admiration and respect for this old man. Leave us some chance of agreeing with you, of believing you sane. For you can't deny that he took the money: there is the plain and simple fact staring you in the face. More than that, his taking it was the justification of those who offered it: it proved to them that he was not the kind of person with whom you should be connected by marriage. I say nothing about the young lady; I don't know her; perhaps

her association all these years with this old—well, I won't call him names—has not affected her in any way; perhaps she believes in him as implicitly as you appear to do. But as for him: well, take any unprejudiced outsider, like myself; what am I to think when I find him accepting this money from strangers?"

"Yes," said Vincent, a little absently; "I suppose to an outsider, that would look bad. But it is because you don't know him, Musselburgh; or the story of his life; or his circumstances. I confess that at one time there were things that disquieted me; I rather shut my eyes to them; but now that I understand what this man is, and what he has gone through, and how he bears himself, it isn't only pity I feel for him, it is respect, and more than respect. But it's a long story; and it would have to be told to sympathetic ears; it would be little use telling it to my father or to my aunt—they have the detectives' version before them—they have the detectives' reading of the case."

"Well, tell me, at least," said his friend. "I want to get at the truth. I have no prejudice or prepossession one way or the other. For another thing, I like to hear the best of everybody—and to believe it, if I can; it makes life pleasanter; and I can't forget, either, that it was through me you got to know George Bethune."

It was a long story, as Vincent had said; and it was a difficult one to set in order and in a proper light: but it was chiefly based on what had been told him by the Toronto banker; and Mr. Thompson's generous interpretation of it ran through it all. Lord Musselburgh listened with the greatest interest and attention. What seemed mostly to strike him was the banker's phrase—"Call George Bethune an impostor, if you like; but the man he has imposed on, his whole life through, has been—George Bethune."

"Well, it's all very extraordinary," he said, when Vincent had finished. "I wish I had taken the trouble to become a little better acquainted with him; one is so apt to judge by the outside; I thought he was merely a picturesque old fellow with a mad enthusiasm about Scotland. And yet I don't know what to say even now. All that you have told me sounds very plausible and possible—if you take that way of looking at it; and the whole thing seems so pitiable, especially for the girl: he has his delusions and self-confidence—she has only her loneliness. But at the same time, Vin, you must admit that these little weaknesses of his might easily be misconstrued——"

"Certainly," said Vincent, with promptitude. "It is just as Mr. Thompson said: if you choose to look at George Bethune through blue spectacles, his way of life must appear very doubtful: if you choose to look at him through pink spectacles, there is something almost heroic about him. And I think, Musselburgh, if you knew the lion-hearted old man a little better, you wouldn't shrink from acknowledging that there was something fine and even grand in his character. As for Maisrie—as for Miss Bethune—she asks for no generous consideration, or forbearance, or anything of the kind; she asks for no leniency of judgment, and needs none; she is beyond and above all that. I know her—none better than I; and she has only to remain what she is—'dass Gott sie erhalte, so schön und rein und hold'!"

There was a break in his voice as he spoke. Lord Musselburgh was silent for a moment—he felt like an intruder upon something too sacred. And yet he had his mission; so presently he forced himself to resume:

"Well, after all, Vin, I think you must grant that there is something to be said for your relatives, even if they have been mistaken. They could not know all that you know—all that you learned in Canada as well; they could only judge from the outside; they could only believe what they heard——"

"Why did they interfere at all?" Vincent demanded, in his turn. "Why had they Mr. Bethune's steps dogged by detectives?"

"You should be the last to protest. It was entirely for your sake that it was done."

"Yes," said Vincent, with a certain scorn. "It was for my sake they were so ready to suspect—it was for my sake they were so eager to regard everything from the attorney's point of view! They would not take my word for anything; they would rather trust to their private inquiry offices. I was supposed to be so easily blinded; the swindlers had such a willing dupe; no reliance was to be placed but on the testimony of spies. What childish rubbish! Why, I introduced my aunt to Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter; she could not find a word to say against them—but her suspicions remained all the same! And then apparently she went and consulted with my father. It was so dreadful that I was being cheated by those two dangerous characters! Couldn't the lawyers and their private inquiry agents—couldn't they make out some story that would appal me? Couldn't they make up some bogey—straw,

and an old coat—that would terrify me out of my wits? And then when I wasn't appalled by their idle trash of stories—oh, for goodness sake, get those desperate creatures smuggled away out of the country! No safety unless they were hidden away somewhere! And then they went to the old man; and I can imagine how they persuaded him. The greatest kindness to every one concerned if only he would fall in with their views; he would save his granddaughter from entering a family who had mistaken, but undoubted, prejudices against her; and of course they couldn't allow him to put himself so much about without endeavouring to pay part of the cost. It was no solatium to the young lady—oh, no, certainly not!—probably she was destined for much higher things; and it was no gift to himself; it was merely that the relatives of that hot-headed young man were desirous of pleasing themselves by showing how much they appreciated his, Mr. Bethune's, generosity in making this little sacrifice. Well, they succeeded: but they little knew—and they little know—what they have done!”

Perhaps there was something in the proud and withal disdainful tones of the young man's voice that was quite as convincing as his words; at all events, his friend said—

“Well, I sympathise with you, Vin, I do really. But you see how I am situated. I am an emissary—an intermediary—I want peace——”

“It is no use saying peace where there is no peace,” Vincent broke in. “Nor need there be war. Silence is best. Let what has been done go; it cannot be undone now.”

“Vincent—if you would only think how fond your aunt is of you—if you would think of her distress——”

“It was she who ought to have considered first,” was the rejoinder. “Do you imagine I have suffered nothing, before I went to America, and then, and since? But that is of little account. I could forgive whatever has happened to myself. It is when I think of some one else—sent adrift upon the world again—but it is better not to talk!”

“Well, yes,” persisted Lord Musselburgh, who was in a sad quandary; for the passionate indignation of this young man seemed so much stronger than any persuasive argument that could be brought against it, “I can perfectly understand how you may consider yourself wronged and injured; and how much more you feel what you consider wrong and injury done to others; but you ought to be a little generous, and take motives into account. Supposing your father and your aunt

were mistaken in acting as they did, it was not through any selfishness on their part. It was for your welfare, as they thought. Surely you must grant that to them."

"I will grant anything to them, in the way of justification," said Vincent, "if they will only take the first step to make atonement for the mischief they have wrought. And that they can do through you. They can tell you on what conditions Mr. Bethune was persuaded to take the money; so that I may go to him, and bring him back—and her."

"But probably they don't know where he is!" his friend exclaimed, in perfect honesty. "My impression was that Mr. Bethune agreed to leave this country for a certain time; but of course no one would think of banishing him to any particular spot."

"And so they themselves don't know where Mr. Bethune has gone?" said Vincent, slowly.

"I believe not. I am almost certain they don't. But I will make inquiries, if you like. In the meantime," said Musselburgh, returning to his original prayer, "do consider, Vin, and be reasonable, and go back to your father's house to-night. Don't make a split in the family. Give them credit for wishing you well. Let me take that message from you to my wife—that you will go home to Grosvenor Place to-night."

"Oh, no," said Vincent, with an air of quiet resolve. "No, no. This is no quarrel. This is no piece of temper. It is far more serious than that; and, as I say, I have seen all along that it was inevitable. After what I have told you, you must recognise for yourself what the situation is. I have spoken to you very freely and frankly; because I know you wish to be friendly; and because I think you want to see the whole case clearly and honestly. But how could I talk to them, or try to explain? Do you think I would insult Miss Bethune by offering them one word of excuse, either on her behalf or on that of her grandfather? No, and it would be no use besides. They are mad with prejudice. No doubt they say I am mad with prepossession. Very well; let it stand so."

Lord Musselburgh at length perceived that his task was absolutely futile. His only chance now was to bring Vincent into a more placable disposition by getting him the information he sought; but he had not much hope on that score; for people do not pay £5,000 and then at once render up all the advantages they fancy they have purchased. So here was a deadlock—he moodily said to himself, as he walked away home to Piccadilly.

And as for Vincent? Well, as it chanced, on the next morning—it was a Wednesday morning—when he went across from the Westminster Palace Hotel to the House of Commons, and got his usual little bundle of letters, the very first one that caught his eye bore the Toronto post-mark. How anxiously he had looked for it from day to day—wondering why Mr. Thompson had heard no news—and becoming more and more heart-sick and hopeless as the weary time went by without a sign—and behold! here it was at last.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEW WAYS OF LIFE.

BUT no sooner had he torn open the envelope than his heart seemed to stand still—with a sort of fear and amazement. For this was Maisrie's own handwriting that he beheld—as startling a thing as if she herself had suddenly appeared before him, after these long, voiceless months. Be sure the worthy banker's accompanying letter did not win much regard: it was this sheet of thin blue paper that he quickly unfolded, his eye catching a sentence here and there, and eager to grasp all that she had to say at once. Alas! there was no need for any such haste: when he came to read the message that she had sent to Toronto, it had little to tell him of that which he most wanted to know. And yet it was a marvellous thing—to hear her speak, as it were! There was no date nor place mentioned in the letter; but none the less had this actual thing come all the way from her; her fingers had penned those lines; she had folded up this sheet of paper that now lay in his hands. It appeared to have been written on board ship: further than that all was uncertain and unknown.

He went into the Library, and sought out a quiet corner; there was something in the strange reticence of this communication that he wished to study with care. And yet there was an apparent simplicity, too. She began by telling Mr. Thompson that her grandfather had asked her to write to him, merely to recall both of them to his memory; and she went on to say that they often talked of him, and thought of him, and of bygone

days in Toronto. "Whether we shall ever surprise you by an unexpected visit in Yonge-street," she proceeded, "I cannot tell; for grandfather's plans seem to be very vague at present, and, in fact, I do not think he likes to be questioned. But as far as I can judge he does not enjoy travelling as much as he used; it appears to fatigue him more than formerly; and from my heart I wish he would settle down in some quiet place, and let me care for him better than I can do in long voyages and railway-journeys. You know what a brave face he puts on everything—and, indeed, becomes a little impatient if you show anxiety on his behalf; still, I can see he is not what he was; and I think he should rest now. Why not in his own country?—that has been his talk for many a day; but I suppose he considers me quite a child yet, and won't confide in me; so that when I try to persuade him that we should go to Scotland, and settle down to a quiet life in some place familiar to him, he grows quite angry, and tells me I don't understand such things. But I know his own fancy goes that way. The other morning I was reading to him on deck, and somehow I got to think he was not listening; so I raised my head; and I saw there were tears running down his cheeks—he did not seem to know I was there at all—and I heard him say to himself—'The beech-woods of Balloray—one look at them—before I die!' And now I never read to him any of the Scotch songs that mention places—such as Yarrow, or Craigieburn, or Logan Braes—he becomes so strangely agitated; for some time afterwards he walks up and down, by himself, repeating the name, as if he saw the place before him; and I know that he is constantly thinking about Scotland, but won't acknowledge it to me or to any one.

"Then here is another piece of news, which is all the news one can send from on board a ship; and it is that poor dear grandfather has grown very *peremptory*! Can you believe it? Can you imagine him irritable and impatient? You know how he has always scorned to be vexed about trifles; how he could always escape from everyday annoyances and exasperations into his own dream-world; but of late it has been quite different; and as I am constantly with him, I am the chief sufferer. Of course I don't mind it, not in the least; if I minded it I wouldn't mention it, you may be sure; I know what his heart really feels towards me. Indeed, it amuses me a little; it is as if I had grown a child again, it is 'Do this' and 'Do that'—and no reason given. Ah, well, there is not much amusement for either of us two: it is something." And here she went on to speak of

certain common friends in Toronto, to whom she wished to be remembered; finally winding up with a very pretty message from "Yours affectionately, Margaret Bethune."

Then Vincent bethought him of the banker; what comments had he to make?

"Dear sir, I enclose you a letter, received to-day, from the pernicious little Omahussy, who says neither where she is nor where she is going, gives no date, nor the name of the ship from which she writes, and is altogether a vexatious young witch. But I imagine this may be the old gentleman's doing; he may have been 'peremptory' in his instructions; otherwise I cannot understand why she should conceal anything from me. And why should he? There also I am in the dark; unless, indeed (supposing him to have some wish to keep their whereabouts unknown to you) he may have seen an announcement in the papers to the effect that you were going to the United States and Canada, in which case he may have guessed that you would probably call on one whose name they had mentioned to you as a friend of theirs. And not a bad guess either: George Bethune is long-headed—when he comes down from the clouds; though why he should take such elaborate precautions to keep away from you, I cannot surmise."

Vincent knew only too well! The banker proceeded:—

"I confess I am disappointed—for the moment. I took it for granted you would have no difficulty in discovering where they were; but of course, if friend George is not going to give his address to anybody, for fear of their communicating with you, some time may elapse before you hear anything definite. I forgot to mention that the post-mark on the envelope was Port Said——"

Port Said! Had Maisrie been at Port Said—and not so long ago either? Instantly there sprang into the young man's mind a vision of the place as he remembered it—a poor enough place, no doubt, but now all lit up by this new and vivid interest: he could see before him the rectangular streets of pink and white shanties, the sandy roads and arid squares, the swarthy Arabs and yellow Greeks and Italians, the busy quays and repairing-yards and docks, the green water and the swarming boats. And did Maisrie and her grandfather—while the great vessel was getting in her coals, and the air was being filled with an almost imperceptible black dust—did they escape down the gangway, and go ashore, and wander about, looking at the strange costumes, and the sun-blinds, and the half-burnt tropical vegetation?

Mr. Thompson went on to say that he himself had never been to Port Said; but that he guessed it was more a calling-place for steamers than a pleasure or health resort; and no doubt the Bethunes had merely posted their letters there *en route*. But were they bound East or West? There was no answer to this question—for they had not given the name of the ship.

So the wild hopes that had arisen in Vincent's breast when he caught sight of Maisrie's handwriting had all subsided again; and the world was as vague and empty as before. Sometimes he tried to imagine that the big steamer which he pictured to himself as lying in the harbour at Port Said was homeward-bound; and that, consequently, even now old George Bethune and his granddaughter might have returned to their own country; and then again something told him that it was useless to search papers for lists of passengers—that the unknown ship had gone away down the Red Sea and out to Australia or New Zealand, or perhaps had struck north towards Canton or Shanghai. He could only wait and watch—and he had a sandal-wood necklace when he wished to dream.

But the truth is he had very little time for dreaming; for Vin Harris was now become one of the very busiest of the millions of busy creatures crowding this London town. He knew his best distraction lay that way; but there were other reasons urging him on. As it chanced, the great statesman who had always been Vincent's especial friend and patron, finding that his private secretary wished to leave him, decided to put the office in commission; that is to say, he proposed to have two private secretaries, the one to look after his own immediate affairs and correspondence, the other to serve as his 'devil,' so to speak, in political matters; and the latter post he offered to Vincent, he having the exceptional qualification of being a member of the House. It is not to be supposed that the ex-Minister was influenced in his choice by the fact that the young man was now on the staff of two important papers, one a daily journal, the other a weekly; for such mundane considerations do not enter the sublime sphere of politics; nor, on the other hand, is it to be imagined that Vincent accepted the offer with all the more alacrity that his hold on those two papers might probably be strengthened by his confidential relations with the great man. Surmises and conjectures in such a case are futile—the mere playthings of one's enemies. It needs only to be stated that he accepted the office with every expectation of hard work; and that he got it. Such hunting up of authorities;

such verification of quotations; such boiling-down of blue-books; such constant attendance at the House of Commons: it was all hardly earned at a salary of £400 a year. But very well he knew that there were many young men in this country who would have rejoiced to accept that position at nothing a year; for it is quite wonderful how private secretaries of Parliamentary chiefs manage, subsequently, to tumble in for good things.

Then it is probable that his journalistic enterprises—which necessarily became somewhat more intermittent after his acceptance of the secretaryship—brought him in, on the average, another £400 a year. On this income he set seriously to work to make himself a miser. His tastes had always been simple—and excellent health may have been at once the cause and the effect of his abstemiousness; but now the meagre fare he allowed himself, and his rigidly economical habits in every way, had a very definite aim in view. He was saving money; he was building up a miniature fortune by half-crowns and pence. Food and drink cost him next to nothing; if he smoked at all, it was a pipe the last thing in the morning before going to bed. Omnibusses served his turn unless some urgent business on behalf of his chief demanded a hansom. He could not give up his club; for that was in a way a political institution; and oftentimes he had to rush up thither to find someone who was not in the precincts of St. Stephen's; but then, on the other hand, in a good club things are much cheaper than in any restaurant or in the members' dining-room of the House of Commons. It was remarkable how the little fortune accumulated; and it was a kind of amusement in a fashion. He pinched himself—and laughed. He debated moral questions—for example as to whether it was lawful to use club-stationery in writing articles for newspapers; but he knew something of the ways of Government offices, and perhaps his conscience was salved by evil example. What the manager of the Westminster Palace Hotel thought of his manner of living can be imagined—if so august an official cared to enquire into such details. His solitary room, breakfast and washing: no more: those were small bills that he called for week by week. And so his little hoard of capital gradually augmented—very gradually, it is true, but surely, as the rate of interest on deposits rose and fell.

In the meanwhile Lord Musselburgh had not been very successful in his endeavours to bring about a reconciliation

between Vin Harris and his family; nor had he been able to obtain the information that Vincent demanded.

"You see, Vin," he said (they were again walking up and down the lamp-lit Terrace, by the side of the deep-flowing river), "my wife is awfully upset over this affair. She thinks it is entirely owing to her mismanagement. She would never have told you about the £5,000 if she had not been certain that that would be conclusive proof to you of the character of those two people; and now that she sees what has come of her telling you so much, she is afraid to tell you any more. Not that I suppose there is much to tell. Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune are no longer in this country; but I doubt whether any one can say precisely where they are——"

"Nonsense!" Vincent broke in, impatiently. "They're humbugging you, Musselburgh. Consider this for a moment. Do you imagine that George Morris handed over that £5,000, as a lump sum, without making stipulations, and very definite stipulations? Do you imagine he would be content to take the word of a man whom he considered a thief? It is absurd to think so. *Do ut facias* would be his motto; and he would take precious good care to keep control over the money in case of non-fulfilment——"

"But there is the receipt!" put in Lord Musselburgh.

"A receipt—for theatrical purposes!" said Vincent, with something of contempt. "You may depend on it the money was not handed over in that unconditional fashion: that is not the way in which George Morris would do business. He has got some hold over Mr. Bethune; and he must know well enough where he is. Supposing Mr. Bethune had that money in his pocket, what is to prevent his returning to this country to-morrow? Where would be the penalty for his breaking his covenant? You don't trust a man whom you consider a swindler; you must have some guarantee; and the guarantee means that you must be able to get at him when you choose. It stands to reason!"

"Yes, I suppose so—it would seem so," said Lord Musselburgh, rather doubtfully; "but at all events it isn't George Morris who is going to open his mouth. I've been to him; he declines; refers me to your family. And then, you see, Vin, I'm rather in an awkward position. I don't want to take sides; I don't want to be a partisan; I would rather act as the friend of all of you; but the moment I try to do anything I am met by a challenge—and a particularly inconvenient challenge it is.

Do I believe with them or do I believe with you? I told your aunt what you said about Mr. Bethune—how you described his character, and all that; but I didn't do it as well as you; for she remains unconvinced. As you told the story, it seemed natural and plausible; but as I told it—and I was conscious of it at the time—it was less satisfactory. And mind you, if you stick to hard facts, and don't allow for any interpretation——”

“If you look through the blue spectacles, in short——”

“Precisely. Well, then, you are confronted with some extremely awkward things. I don't wonder that your aunt asks pertinently why, if you are to begin and extend this liberal construction of conduct—this allowing for motives—this convenient doctrine of forgiving everything to self-deception—I don't wonder that she asks why anybody should be sent to prison at all.”

“Oh, as for that,” said Vincent, frankly, “I don't say it would be good for the commonwealth if all of us were George Bethunes. Far from it. I look upon him as a sort of magnificent *lusus naturæ*; and I would not have him other than he is—not in any one particular. But a nation of George Bethunes?—it would soon strike its head against the stars.”

“Very well, then,” said his friend, “you are not contending for any general principle. I don't see why you and your family shouldn't be prepared to agree. You may both of you be right. You don't insist upon having the justifications you extend to Mr. Bethune extended to everyone else, or to any one else; you make him the exception; and you needn't quarrel with those who take a more literal view of his character.”

“Literal?” said Vincent, with a certain coldness. “Blindness—want of consideration—want of understanding—is that to be literal? Perhaps it is. But I thought you said something just now about Mr. Bethune and a prison: will you tell me of any one action of his that would suggest imprisonment?”

“Your aunt was merely talking of theories,” said Musselburgh, rather uneasily, for he had not intended to use the phrase. “What I urge is this—why shouldn't both of you admit that there may be something in the other's view of Mr. Bethune, and agree to differ? I stand between you: I can see how much can be advanced on both sides.”

“And so you would patch up a truce,” said Vincent. “How long would it last? Of course I do not know for what

period of banishment my kind relatives stipulated; £5000 is a considerable sum to pay; I suppose they bargained that Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter should remain away from England for some time. But not for ever? Even then, is it to be imagined that they cannot be found? Either in this country or abroad, Miss Bethune and I meet face to face again; and she becomes my wife—I hope. It is what I live for. And then? Where will your patched-up truce be then? Besides, I don't want any sham friendships with people who have acted as they have done——”

“It was in your interest, Vin,” his friend again urged. “Why not give them a little of the lenient judgment you so freely extend to those others——”

“To those others?” replied Vincent, firing up hotly. “To whom?”

“To Mr. Bethune, then,” was the pacific reply.

“I don't think Mr. Bethune ever consciously wronged any human being. But they—were they not aware what they were doing when they played this underhand trick? sending that girl out into the world again, through her devotion to her grandfather? I have told you before: there is no use crying peace, peace, when there is no peace. Let them undo some of the mischief they have done, first: then we will see. And look at this silly affectation of secrecy! They told me too much when they told me they had paid money to get George Bethune out of the country: then I understood why Maisrie went: then I knew I must have patience until she came back—in the same mind as when she left, that I know well. I was puzzled before, and sometimes anxious; but now I understand; now I am content to wait. And I have plenty to do in the meantime. I have to gain a proper foothold—and make some provision for the future as well: already I am independent of anybody and everybody. And perhaps in time to come, when it is all over, when all these things have been set right, I may be able to forgive; but I shall not be able to forget.”

This was all the message that Lord Musselburgh had to take home with him, to his wife's profound distress. For she was very fond of her nephew, and very proud of him, too, and of the position he had already won for himself; and what she had done she had done with the best intentions towards him. Once, indeed, she confessed to her husband that in spite of herself she had a sort of sneaking admiration for Vincent's obdurate consistency and faith; insomuch (she said) that—if only the

old man and all his chicaneries were out of the way—she could almost find it in her heart to try to like the girl, for Vincent's sake.

"The real question," she continued, "the thing that concerns me most of all to think of is this: can a girl who has been so dragged through the mire have retained her purity of mind and her proper self-respect? Surely she must have known that her grandfather was wheedling people out of money right and left—and that he took her about with him to enlist sympathy? Do you suppose she was not perfectly aware that Vincent invariably paid the bills at those restaurants? When tradespeople were pressing for money, do you fancy she was in ignorance all the time? Very well: what a life for any one to lead! How could she hold up her head amongst ordinarily honest and solvent people? Even supposing that she herself was all she ought to be, the humiliation must have sunk deep. And even if one were to try to like her, there would always be that consciousness between her and you. You might be sorry for her, in a kind of way; but you would be still sorrier for Vincent; and that would be dreadful."

"My dear Madge," her husband said—in his character of mediator and peacemaker, "you are arguing on a series of assumptions and prejudices. If Vin does hold on to his faith in those two—and if he does in the end marry Miss Bethune—I shall comfort myself with the conviction that he was likely to know more about them than anybody else. He and they have been on terms of closest intimacy, and for a long time; and you may be pretty sure that the girl Vin wants to marry is no tarnished kind of a person—in his eyes."

"Ah, yes—in his eyes!" said Lady Musselburgh, rather sadly.

"Well, his eyes are as clear as most folks'—at least, I've generally found them so," her husband said—trying what a little vague optimism would do.

One afternoon Vincent was walking along Piccadilly—and walking rapidly, as was his wont, for the twin purposes of exercise and economy—when he saw, some way ahead of him, Lady Musselburgh crossing the pavement to her carriage. She saw him, too, and stopped—colour mounting to her face. When he came up he merely lifted his hat, and would have kept on his way but that she addressed him.

"Vincent!" she said, in an appealing, half-reproachful fashion.

And then she said—

"I want you to come into the house for a few minutes—I must speak with you."

"Is there any use?" he asked, rather coldly.

However, she was very much embarrassed, as her heightened colour showed; and he could not keep her standing here in Piccadilly; he said 'Very well,' and followed her up the steps and into the house. When they had got into the drawing-room she shut the door behind them, and began at once—with not a little piteous agitation in her manner.

"Vin, this is too dreadful! Can nothing be done? Why are you so implacable? I suppose you don't understand what you have been to me, always, and how I have looked to your future as something almost belonging to me, something that I was to be proud of; and now that it is all likely to come true, you go and make a stranger of yourself! When I see your name in the papers, or hear you spoken of at a dinner-table—it is someone who is distant from me, as if I had no concern with him any longer. People come up to me and say 'Oh, I heard your nephew speak at the Mansion House the other afternoon,' or 'I met your nephew at the Foreign Office last night;' and I cannot say 'Don't you know; he has gone and made himself a stranger to us—?'"

"I wonder who it was who made a stranger of me!" he interposed—but quite impassively.

"I can only say, again and again, that it was done for the best, Vin!" she answered him. "The mistake I made was in letting you know. But I took it for granted that as soon as you were told that those people had accepted money from us to go away—"

"Those people? What people?" he demanded, with a sterner air.

"Oh, I meant only Mr. Bethune himself," said she, hastily. "Oh, yes, certainly, only him; there were no negotiations with any one else."

"Negotiations!" he said, with a touch of scorn. "Well, perhaps you can tell me what those negotiations were? How long did Mr. Bethune undertake to remain out of this country?"

"Three years, Vin," said she, timidly regarding him.

"Three years?" he repeated, in an absent way.

"But there is no reason," she added quickly, "why he should not return at any moment if he wishes: so I understand: of

course, I did not make the arrangement—but I believe that is so."

"Return at any moment?" he said, slowly. "Do you mean to tell me that you put £5,000 into that old man's hands, on condition he should leave the country for three years, and that all the same you left him free to return at any moment?"

"Of course he would forfeit the money," said she, rather nervously.

"But how could he forfeit the money if he already has it? He has got the money: you showed me the receipt. Come, aunt," said he, in quite a different tone, "Let us be a little more honest and above-board. Shall I tell you how I read the whole situation? You can contradict me if I am wrong. But that receipt you showed me: wasn't it produced for merely theatrical purposes? Wasn't it meant to crush and overwhelm me as a piece of evidence? The money wasn't handed over like that, was it? Supposing I were to conjecture that somebody representing you or representing my father has still got control over that money; and that it is to be paid in instalments as it is earned—by absence? Well isn't that so?"

He fixed his eyes on her; she hesitated—and was a little confused.

"I tell you, Vin," she said, "I had personally nothing to do with making the arrangement; all that was left in George Morris's hands; and of course he would take whatever precautions he thought necessary. And why should you talk about theatrical purposes? I really did think that when I could show you Mr. Bethune was ready to take money from strangers to go away from England you would change your opinion of him. But apparently, in your eyes, he can do no wrong. He is not to be judged by ordinary rules and standards. Everything is to be twisted about on his behalf, and forgiven, or even admired. Nobody else is allowed such latitude of construction; and everything is granted to him—because he is George Bethune. But I don't think it is quite fair: or that you should take sides against your own family."

This was an adroit stroke, following upon a very clever attempt to extricate herself from an embarrassing position; but his thoughts were otherwise occupied.

"I should like you to tell me," said he, "if you can, what moral wrong was involved in Mr. Bethune consenting to accept that money. Where was the harm—or the ignominy? Do you

think I cannot guess at the representations and inducements put before him, to get him to stay abroad for three years? Why, I could almost tell you, word for word, what was said to him! Here was an arrangement that would be of incalculable benefit to everybody concerned. He would be healing up family dissensions. He would be guarding his granddaughter from a marriage that could only bring her disappointment and humiliation. Three years of absence and forgetfulness would put an end to all those projects. And then, of course, you could not ask him to throw up his literary engagements and incur the expense of travel, without some compensation. Here is a sum of £5,000, which will afford him some kind of security, in view of this disturbance of his engagements. A receipt? oh, yes, a receipt, if necessary! But then, again, on second thoughts, wouldn't it only be prudent to lodge this £5,000 with some third person, some man of position whom all could trust, and who would send it in instalments, to avoid the risk of carrying so large a sum about with one? There might be a little harmless condition or two attached, moreover. You undertake, for example, that the young people shall not have communication with each other; you say your granddaughter will do as you wish in all things. Very well, take her away: disappear, both of you; you are doing us an immense kindness, and you are acting in the best interests of all concerned. Never mind a little misery here or there, or the risk of a broken heart; we can afford to pay for such things; we can afford to have the moulds of a dessert service destroyed—and a little matter of £5,000 is not much, when we have plans. . . . And so those two go out into the world again." He paused for a second. "Well, aunt, you've had your way; and there's no more to be said, except this, perhaps, that you don't seem to realise the greatest of all the mistakes you have made. Your three years, even if they should be three years of absence, will not be years of forgetfulness on either Maisrie Bethune's part or mine. Oh, no; nothing of the kind; don't cherish any illusions on that score. It happened curiously that just before they left Brighton she and I had a little talk over one or two things; and she asked me for a promise, which I gave her, and which I mean to keep."

Well, the handsome lad now standing before her had a great hold on her affection; and she even admired, in a covert way, this very bigotry of constancy and unswerving faith of his, so that for an instant her head swam, and she was on the point of

crying out 'Vincent—Vincent—go and bring her to me—and I will take her to my heart—for your sake!' But the next moment she had recovered from that mad impulse: she saw that what had been done was not to be undone in that happy-go-lucky fashion, even if it could be undone at all; and she was silent and embarrassed. It was he who spoke.

"Well, you must excuse me, aunt; I've to be down at the House by question time.

"You're not going like that, Vin!" she exclaimed.

"What do you want of me?" he asked in a coldly civil way.

"I—I—want you to be as you once were, to all of us," she cried, rather incoherently. "I want you to go back to Grosvenor Place; and to accept the allowance your father has made you ever since you came of age; and to resume the old bygone relations with us. Surely it might be possible, with a little consideration on both sides. What we have done was done entirely out of thoughtfulness for you; and if we have made a mistake—we are only human beings! And remember, it is quite possible that you may be mistaken too, Vin; you may be mistaken just as much as we—and—and—"

"What you propose, aunt," said he (for time was precious with him) "even if it were practicable, would only be temporary. I am looking forward to marrying Maisrie Bethune—in spite of your three years of forgetfulness!—and when that happens, your patched-up state of affairs would all come to bits again. So what is the use of professing a sort of sham reconciliation? I have no wish to return to Grosvenor Place. I have taken some rooms at the foot of Buckingham-street; and I have a key that lets me through by the Embankment Gardens into Villiers-street; it will be convenient for getting to the House. And I can tide along pretty well without any allowance from my father; in fact, I'm saving a little money in a quiet way—"

"But at what a cost, Vincent—at what a cost!" she protested. "I wish you could see how worn and ill you are looking—"

"Well, I've had some things to think of lately—thanks to my kind relatives!" said he. "But really I must be off—"

"Vincent," she said, making one last despairing effort to bring things back to their former footing, "when are you going to ask Louie Drexel and me to dine with you at the House?"

"I'm so busy, aunt, just now," said he, as he opened the door for her. Then he saw her into her carriage; and she drove away—a most perplexed and unhappy woman.

These rooms that Vincent had taken at the foot of Buckingham-street were right up at the top of the building; and commanded a spacious prospect of the river, the Embankment gardens, the bridges, the great dusky world of London lying all around, and the dome of St. Paul's rising dim and phantasmal in the east. They were bachelor chambers, that had doubtless seen many tenants (the name of one, George Brand, was still over the door, and Vincent did not think it worth while to change it), but the young man had no sooner entered into possession than he began a series of alterations and improvements that bachelor chambers did not seem to demand. Not in any hurry, however; nor perhaps with any fixed intent; it was a kind of amusement for this or that odd half-hour he could snatch from his multifarious duties. To begin with, he had the woodwork painted a deep Indian red, and the walls a pearly-blue grey: while the former colour was repeated in the Japanese window-curtains, and the latter by the great world outside, on the lambent moonlight nights, or sometimes in the awakening of the dawn, as he lay in a low easy-chair, and watched the vast, silent city coming out of its sleep. This top-floor was a very still place, except for the early chattering of the tree-sparrows, into whose nests, swaying on the branches just beneath him, he could have tossed a biscuit. And then his peregrinations through London, rapid though they were as a rule, occasionally brought him face-to-face with a bric-à-brac shop; and from time to time he picked up one thing or another, just as it happened to strike his fancy. Perhaps these modest purchases were just a trifle too elegant for a bachelor's apartments; the sitting-room away up in that lofty situation came to look rather like a boudoir; for example, there was a music-stand in rosewood and ormolu—a tall stand it was, as if for a violin player—which he himself never used. Pictures he could not afford; but books he could; and the volumes which were one by one added to those shelves were of a more graceful and literary stamp than you would have expected to find in the library of a young and busy member of Parliament. It was not a lordly palace of art, this humble suite of apartments in the neighbourhood of the Strand; but there was a prevailing air of selection and good taste; perhaps, one ought to say, of expectancy, also, in the presence of things not yet in use.

Then the two large and low windows of the sitting-room were all surrounded with ivy, of long training; but besides that, there were flower-boxes; and at a moment's notice, and at small expense, these could be filled with potted geraniums, if one wished to be gay. And always outside was the varied panorama of the mighty city; the wide river and the bridges, the spires and the towers, the far masses of buildings becoming more and more spectral as they receded into the grey and wavering mist. Sometimes the rose and saffron of the dawn were there, ascending with a soft suffusion behind the purple dome of St. Paul's; sometimes there were blown and breezy days, with flying showers and watery gleams of sunlight; and sometimes the night lay blue and still and clear, the Surrey side in black and mysterious shadow, the white moon high in the south. These silent altitudes were a fine place for dreaming, after all the toil and moil of the working-hours were over; and a fine place for listening, too; sometimes, towards the morning, just as the leaves began to stir, you could fancy the wind was bringing a message with it—it seemed, coming from far away, to say something about *Claire Fontaine*.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN A NORTHERN VILLAGE.

BUT there were to be no three years of absence, still less of forgetfulness. One afternoon, on Vincent's going down to the House, he found a telegram along with his letters. He opened it mechanically, little thinking; but the next moment his eyes were staring with amazement. For these were the words he saw before him:—"Grandfather very ill; would like to see you. Maisrie Bethune, Crossmains, by Cupar." Then through his bewilderment there flashed the sudden thought: why, the lands of Balloray were up in that Fifeshire region!—had, then, the old man, tired of his world wanderings, and feeling this illness coming upon him, had he at length crept home to die, perhaps as a final protest? And Maisrie was alone there, among strangers, with this weight of trouble fallen upon her. Why

could not these intervening hours, and the long night, and the great distance, be at once annihilated?—he saw Maisrie waiting for him, with piteous eyes and outstretched hands.

He never could afterwards recall with any accuracy how he passed those hours: it all seemed a dream. And a dream it seemed next day, when he found himself in a dogcart, driving through a placid and smiling country, with the sweet summer air blowing all around him. He talked to the driver, to free his mind from anxious and futile forecasts. Crossmains, he was informed, was a small place. There was but the one inn in it—the Balloray Arms. Most likely, if two strangers were to arrive on a visit, they would put up at the inn; but very few people did go through—perhaps an occasional commercial traveller.

“And where is Balloray House—or Balloray Castle?” was the next question.

“Just in there, sir,” said the man, with a jerk of his whip towards the woods past which they were driving.

And of course it was with a great interest and curiosity that Vincent looked out for this place of which he had heard so much. At present nothing could be seen but the high stone wall that surrounds so many Scotch estates; and, branching over that, a magnificent row of beeches; but by and bye they came to a clearing in the “policies”; and all at once the Castle appeared in sight—a tall, rectangular building, with a battlemented parapet and corner turrets, perched on a spacious and lofty plateau. It looked more modern than he had imagined to himself; but perhaps it had been recently renovated. From the flag-staff overtopping the highest of the turrets a flag idly dropped and swung in the blue of the summer sky: no doubt the proprietor was at home—in proud possession; while the old man who considered himself the rightful owner of the place was lying, perhaps stricken unto death, in some adjacent cottage or village inn. Then the woods closed round again; and the mansion of Balloray was lost from view.

Vincent was not in search of the picturesque, or he might have been disappointed with this village of Crossmains—which consisted of but one long and wide thoroughfare, bordered on each hand with a row of bare and mean-looking cottages and insignificant houses. When they drove up to the inn, he did not notice that it was a small, two-storied, drab-hued building of the most common-place appearance; that was not what he was thinking of at all; his heart was beating high with

emotion—what wonder might not meet his eager gaze at any instant? And indeed he had hardly entered the little stone passage when Maisrie appeared before him; she had heard the vehicle arrive, and had quickly come down-stairs; and now she stood quite speechless—her trembling, warm hands clasped in his, her face upturned to him, her beautiful sad eyes all dimmed with tears, and yet having a kind of joy in them, too, and pride. She could not say a single word: he would have to understand that she was grateful to him for his instant response to her appeal. And perhaps there was more than gratitude; she seemed to hunger to look at him—for she had not seen him for so long a while: perhaps she had never thought to see him again.

“Have you any better news, Maisrie?” said he.

She turned and led the way into a little parlour.

“Yes,” said she (and the sound of her voice startled him: the Maisrie of his many dreams, sleeping and waking, had been all so silent!). “Grandfather is rather better. I think he is asleep now—or almost asleep. It is a fever—a nervous fever—and he has been so exhausted—and often delirious; but he is quieter now—rest is everything—”

“Maisrie,” he said again (in his bewilderment) “it is a wonderful thing to hear you speak! I can hardly believe it. Where have you been all this while? Why did you go away from me?”

“I went because grandfather wished it,” said she. “I will tell you some other time. He is anxious to see you. He has been fretting about so many things; and he will not confide in me—not entirely—I can see that there is concealment. And Vincent,” she went on, with her appealing eyes fixed on him, “don’t speak to him about Craig-Royston?—and don’t let him speak about it. When he got ill in Cairo, it was more home-sickness than anything else, as I think; and he said he wanted to go and die in his own country and among his own people; and so we began to come to Scotland by slow stages. And now that we are here, there is no one whom he knows; he is quite as much alone here as he was in Egypt; far more alone than we used to be in Canada. I fancy he expects that a message may come for me from Balloray—that I am to go there and be received; and of course that is quite impossible; I do not know them, they do not know me; I don’t suppose they are even aware that we are living in this place. But if he is disappointed in that, it is Craig-Royston he will think of next—he will want

to go there to seek out relatives on my account. Well, Vincent, about Craig-Royston—”

She hesitated; and the pale and beautiful face became suffused with a sort of piteous embarrassment.

“But I understand, Maisrie, quite well!” said he, boldly. “Why should you be troubled about that? You have found out there is no such place?—but I could have told you so long ago! There was a district so-named at one time; and that is quite enough for your grandfather; a picturesque name takes his fancy, and he brings it into his own life. Where is the harm of that? There may have been Grants living there at one time—and they may have intermarried with the Bethunes: anyhow your grandfather has talked himself into believing there was such a relationship; and even if it is a delusion, what injury does it do to any human creature? Why,” he went on, quite cheerfully, to reassure her and give her comfort, “I am perfectly aware that no Scotch family ever had ‘Stand Fast, Craig-Royston!’ as its motto. But if the phrase caught your grandfather’s ear, why should not he choose it for his motto? Every motto has been chosen by some one at some one time. And then, if he thereafter came to persuade himself that this motto had been worn by his family, or by some branch of his family, what harm is there in that? It is only a fancy—it is an innocent delusion—it injures no one—”

“Yes, but, Vincent,” she said—for these heroic excuses did not touch the immediate point—“grandfather is quite convinced about the Grants of Craig-Royston; and he will be going away in search of them, so that I may find relatives and shelter. And the disappointment will be terrible. For he has got into a habit of fretting that never was usual with him. He has fits of distrusting himself, too, and begins to worry about having done this or done that; and you know how unlike that is to his old courage, when he never doubted for a moment but that everything he had done was done for the best. And to think that he should vex himself by imagining he had not acted well by me—when he has given his whole life to me, as long as I can remember—”

“Maisrie,” said he, “when your grandfather gets well, and able to leave this place, where are you going?”

“How can I say?” she made answer, wistfully enough.

“For I do not mean to let you disappear again. No, no. I shall not let you out of my sight again. Do you know that I have a house waiting for you, Maisrie?”

"For me?" she said, looking up surprised.

"For whom else, do you imagine? And rather pretty the rooms are, I think. I have got a stand for your music, Maisrie: that will be handier for you than putting it on the table before you."

She shook her head, sadly.

"My place is with my grandfather, Vincent," she said. "And now I will go and see how he is. He wished to know as soon as possible of your arrival."

She left the room and was absent only for a couple of minutes.

"Yes; will you come upstairs, Vincent?" she said on her return. "I'm afraid you will find him much changed. And sometimes he wanders a little in his talking; you must try to keep him as quiet as may be."

As they entered the room, an elderly Scotch-woman—most probably the landlady—who had been sitting there, rose and came out. Vincent went forward. Despite Maisrie's warning he was startled to notice the ravages the fever had wrought; but if the proud and fine features were pinched and worn, the eyes were singularly bright—bright and furtive at the same time. And at sight of his visitor, old George Bethune made a desperate effort to assume his usual gallant air.

"Ha?" said he—though his laboured breathing made this affectation of gaiety a somewhat pitiable thing—"the young legislator—fresh from the senate—the listening senate, the applause of multitudes—"

He turned his restless eyes on Maisrie; and said in quite an altered tone—

"Go away, girl, go away!"

Well, Maisrie's nerves were all unstrung by anxiety and watching; and here was her lover just arrived, to listen to her being so cruelly and sharply rebuked; and so, after a moment of indecision, she lost her self-control, she flung herself on her knees by the side of the bed, and burst out crying.

"Don't speak to me like that, grandfather," she sobbed, "don't speak to me like that!"

"Well, well, well," said he, in an altered tone, "I did not mean to hurt you. No, no, Maisrie; you're a good lass—a good lass—none better in the whole kingdom of Scotland. I was not thinking—I beg your pardon, my dear—I beg your pardon."

She rose, and kissed his hand, and left the room. Then old George Bethune turned to his visitor, and began to talk to him

in a curiously rapid way—rapid and disconnected and confused—while the brilliant eyes were all the time fixed anxiously on the young man.

“Yes, I am glad you have come—I have been sorely perplexed,” he said, in his husky and hurried fashion; “—perhaps, when one is ill, confidence in one’s own judgment gives way a little—and it is not—every one whom you can consult. But that is not the main thing—not the main thing at all—a question of money is a minor thing—but yesterday—I think it was yesterday—my voice seemed to be going from me—and I thought—I would leave you a message. The book there—bring it—”

He looked towards a red volume that was lying on the window-sill. Vincent went and fetched it; though even as he did so, he thought it strange that a man who was perhaps lying on his deathbed should bother about a book of ballads. But when, he might have asked himself, had George Bethune ever seemed to realise the relative importance of the things around him? To him a harebell brought from the Braes of Gleniffer was of more value than a king’s crown.

“Open at the mark,” said the sick man, eagerly. “See if you understand—without much said—to her, I mean. Poor lass—poor lass—I caught her crying once or twice—while we were away—and I have been asking myself whether—whether it was all done for the best.” Then he seemed to pull himself together a little. “Yes, yes, it was done for the best—what appeared best for every one; but now—well, now it may be judged differently—I am not what I was—I hope I—have done no wrong.”

Vincent turned to the marked page; and there he found a verse of one of the ballads pencilled round, with the last line underscored. This is what he read:

He turned his face unto the wa’,
And death was with him dealing;
“Adieu, adieu, my dear friends a’—
Be kind to Barbara Allen!”

The old man was watching him anxiously and intently.

“Yes, I understand,” Vincent said. “And I think you may depend on me.”

“Then there is another thing,” the old man continued—his mind leaping from one point to another with marvellous quickness, though he himself seemed so languid and frail. I—I wish to have all things left in order. If the summons—comes—I

must be able to meet it—with head up—fear never possessed me during life. But who has not made mistakes—who has not made mistakes?—not understood at the time. And yet perhaps it was not a mistake—I am not the man I was—I have doubts—I thought I was doing well by all—but now—I am uneasy—questions come to me in the night-time—and I have not my old strength—I cannot cast them behind me as in better days.”

He glanced towards the door.

“Keep Maisrie out,” said he. “Poor lass—poor lass—I thought I was doing well for her—but when I found her crying—Take care she does not come back for a minute or two——”

“She won’t come until you send for her,” Vincent interposed.

“Then I must make haste—and you must listen. The money—that I was persuaded to take from your family—that must be paid back—to the last farthing; and it will not be difficult—oh, no, not difficult—not much of it has been used—Bevan and Morris will tell you—Bevan and Morris, Pall Mall, London. And indeed I meant to do what I promised—when I went away—but when I got ill—I could not bear the idea of being buried out of Scotland—I was like the Swiss soldier—in the trenches—who heard the Alphorn—something arose in my breast—and Maisrie, she was always a biddable lass—she was just as willing to come away. But the money—well, is there one who knows me who does not know how I have scorned that—that delight of the ignoble and base-born?—and yet this is different—this must be paid back—for Maisrie’s sake—every farthing—to your family. She must be no beggar—in their eyes. And you must not tell her anything—I trust you—if I can trust you to take care of her I can trust you in smaller things—so take a pencil now—quick—when I remember it—and write down his address—Daniel Thompson——”

“Of Toronto?” said Vincent. “I know him.”

At this moment George Bethune turned his head a little on one side, and wearily closed his eyes. Vincent, assuming that he now wished for rest—that perhaps he might even have sunk into sleep, which was the all-important thing for him—thought it an opportune moment to retire; and on tiptoe made for the door. But even that noiseless movement was sufficient to arouse those abnormally sensitive faculties; those restless eyes held him again.

“No—no—do not go,” the old man said, in the same half-

incoherent, eager fashion. "I must have all put in order—Daniel Thompson—banker—Toronto—he will make that all straight with your family. For Maisrie's sake—and more than that he would do for her—and be proud and glad to do it too. He will be her friend—and you—well, I leave her to you—you must provide a house for her."

"It is ready," said Vincent.

"She will make a good wife—she will stand firm by the man she marries—she has courage—and a loyal heart. Perhaps—perhaps I should have seen to it before—perhaps you should have had your way at Brighton—and she—well, she was so willing to go—that deceived me. And there must be laughing now for her—it is natural for a young lass to be glad and merry—not any more weeping—she is in her own land. Why," said he, and his eyes burned still more brightly, and his speech became more inconsecutive, though always hurried and panting. "I remember a story—a story that a servant lass used to tell me when I was a child—I used to go into the kitchen—when she was making the bread—it was a story about a fine young man called Eagle—he had been carried away to an eagle's nest when he was an infant—and his sweetheart was called Angel. Well, I do not remember all the adventures—I have been thinking sometimes that they must have been of Eastern origin—Eastern origin—yes—the baker who tried to burn him in an oven—the Arabian Nights—but no matter—at the end he found his sweetheart—and there was a splendid wedding. And just as they were married, a white dove flew right down the middle of the church, and called aloud '*Kurroo, kurroo ; Eagle has got his Angel now !*' I used to imagine I could see them at the altar—and the white dove flying down the church——"

"Don't you think you should try to get a little rest now?" Vincent said, persuasively. "You have arranged everything—all is put in order. But what we want is for you to get rest and quiet, until this illness leaves you, and you grow strong and well again."

"Yes, yes," said the old man, quickly, "that is quite right—that is so—for I must pay off Thompson, you know, I must pay off Thompson. Thompson is a good fellow—and an honest Scot—but he used to talk a little. Let him do this—for Maisrie's sake—afterwards—afterwards—when I am well and strong again—I will square up accounts with him. Oh, yes, very easily," he continued; and now he began to whisper in a mysterious manner. "Listen, now—I have a little scheme in

mind—not a word to anybody—there might be some one quick to snatch it up. It is a volume I have in mind—a volume on the living poets of Scotland—think of that, now—a splendid subject, surely!—the voice of the people—everyday sorrows and joys—the minstrelsy of a whole race. There was the American book—but something went wrong—I did not blame any one—and I was glad it was published—Carmichael let me review it—yes, yes, there may be a chance for me yet—I may do something yet—for auld Scotland's sake! I have been looking into the *domus exilis Plutonia*—the doors have been wide open—but still there may be a chance—there is some fire still burning within. But my memory is not what it was,” he went on, in a confused, perplexed way. “I once had a good memory—an excellent memory—but now things escape me. Yesterday—I think it was yesterday—I could not tell whether Bob Tennant was still with us—and his verses to Allander Water have all gone from me—all but a phrase—‘How sweet to roam by Allander’—‘How sweet to roam by Allander’—no, my head is not so clear as it ought to be—”

“No, of course not,” said Vincent, in a soothing sort of way. “How could you expect it, with this illness? But these things will all come back. And I’m going to help you as much as I can. When I was in New York I heard your friend, Hugh Anstruther, deliver a speech about those living Scotch poets, and he seemed to be well acquainted with them; I will write to him for any information you may want. So now—now that is all settled; and I would try to rest for a while, if I were you: that is the main thing—the immediate thing.”

But the old man went on without heeding him, muttering to himself, as it were:

“Chambers’s Journal—perhaps as far back as thirty years since—there’s one verse has rung in my ears all this time—but the rest is all blank—and the name of the writer forgotten, if it ever was published . . . ‘Tis by Westray that she wanders . . . ‘Tis by Westray that she strays . . . O waft me, Heavens, to Westray . . . in the spring of the young days!’ . . . No, no, it cannot be Westray—Westray is too far north—Westray?—Yet it sounds right . . . ‘Tis by Westray that she wanders . . . ‘tis by Westray that she strays—’”

There was a tap at the door, and the doctor appeared: a little, old, white-haired man, of sharp and punctilious demeanour. Behind him was the landlady, hanging back somewhat as if it were for further instructions; so, she being there

to help, Vincent thought he would go downstairs and seek out Maisrie. He found her in the little parlour—awaiting him.

“What do you think, Vincent?” she said, quickly.

“I haven’t spoken to the doctor yet,” he made answer. “Of course, every one can see that your grandfather is very ill; but if courage will serve, who could have a better chance? And I will tell you this, Maisrie, he is likely to have more peace of mind now. He has been vexing himself about many things, as you guessed; and although he was wandering a good deal while I was with him—perhaps all the time—I could not quite make sure—still, it is wonderful how he has argued these matters out, and how clearly you can follow his meaning. It was about you and your future he was most troubled—in the event of anything happening to him; and he has not been afraid to look all possibilities in the face; he told me the doors of the *domus exilis Plutonia* had stood wide open before him, and I know he was not the one to be alarmed, for himself. But about you, Maisrie: do you know that he has given you over to me—if the worst comes to the worst? He asked me to provide a home for you: I told him it was already there, awaiting you. You see I have not forgotten what you said to me at Brighton; and I knew that some day you and I should find ourselves, as we now find ourselves, face to face—perhaps in sad circumstances, but all the more dependent on each other——”

“Do you think he is so very ill, Vincent?” she said: she seemed to have no thought of herself—only of her grandfather.

“You must see he is very ill, Maisrie—very,” he answered her. “But, as I say, if splendid courage will serve, then you may hope for the best. And he ought to be quieter in mind now. We will hear what the doctor has to say——”

But at this moment there was an unwonted sound without in the still little village—the sound of carriage-wheels on the stony street; and presently some vehicle, itself unseen, was heard to stop in front of the inn. In another second or so, a servant-girl opened the door of the parlour and timidly said to Maisrie—

“Miss Bethune, Miss.”

“Miss Bethune?” Maisrie repeated, wondering.

“From the Castle, Miss,” the girl said, in awe-stricken tones.

And it was curious that at such a crisis Maisrie’s eyes should turn instinctively to Vincent—as if to appeal for advice. Of course his decision was taken on the instant.

"Ask Miss Bethune to step this way, then," he said to the girl.

Maisrie rose—pale a little, but absolutely self-possessed. She did not know who this might be—perhaps the bearer of grave and harassing tidings for her grandfather; for she had grown to fear Balloray, and all its associations and belongings. As it turned out she had not much to fear from this emissary. There came into the room a tall and elegant lady of about thirty, not very pretty, but very gentle-looking, with kind grey eyes. For a brief second she seemed embarrassed on finding a third person present; but that passed directly; she went up to Maisrie, and took her hand and held it, and said, in a voice so sweet and winning that it went straight to the heart—

"Dr. Lenzie has told me of your trouble. I'm very, very sorry. Will you let me help you in any way that is possible? May I send to Edinburgh for a trained nurse to give you assistance; and in the meantime, if you wished it, I could send along my maid to do anything you wanted——"

Maisrie pressed her to be seated, and tried, in rather uncertain accents, to thank her for her exceeding kindness. For this stranger, with the greatest tact, made no apology for her intrusion; it was no case of the castle coming to the cottage, with acts of officious benevolence; it was simply one woman appealing to another woman to be allowed to help her in dire straits. Whether she knew that the old man upstairs claimed to be the rightful owner of Balloray, whether she knew that the beautiful pensive-eyed girl who was speaking to her had indirectly suffered through that legal decision of generations ago, Vincent could not at the moment guess: what was obvious was merely this womanly act of sympathy and charity, for which Maisrie Bethune showed herself abundantly grateful. When the doctor came down, this visitor with the friendly eyes and the soft voice explained that, just in case the patient should need brandy to keep up his strength, she had taken the liberty of bringing some with her—of good quality: the resources of the Balloray Arms being limited in that respect. As she said this she hesitatingly blushed a little; and Vincent thought she looked really beautiful. He recalled to himself his aunt, Lady Musselburgh; and wondered whether she, with all her fine presence and eloquent eyes, could look as nobly beautiful as this poor woman, who was rather plain.

The doctor's report was on the whole encouraging; the tem-

perature of the patient was the least thing lower, and he was more equable in mind.

"He appears to have been greatly pleased by your visit, sir," the little doctor said, in a strong east-country accent, to the young man. "Very pleased indeed. And it is just wonderful how he can reason and explain; though I'm not so sure he'll be able to remember all he's been saying. But now, he tells me, all his dispositions are made; he is content; there is nothing more on his mind—except, as I gather, about some book."

"I know all about that," said Maisrie. "I can pacify him about that; and I'm going upstairs directly."

Of course she had to wait and see Miss Bethune and the doctor leave; then she turned to Vincent.

"Will you go out for a walk, Vincent? I have asked Mrs. MacGill to let you have some dinner at seven."

"Oh, don't you bother about me, Maisrie!" he said. "Can't I be of any use to you upstairs?"

"Not unless grandfather asks for you again—then I will send for you," she answered.

She was going away when he interrupted her for a moment.

"I will come up whenever you want me," he said; and then he added: "But—but—you know him so much better than I do, Maisrie. Do you think we should tell him of Miss Bethune having been here?"

"Oh, no, no, Vincent!" she said, in earnest remonstrance. "Nothing would excite him more terribly. You know he has already been talking of some message coming from Balloray to me—of the possibility of it—and this would set his brain working in a hundred different directions. He might think they were coming to take me away from him—perhaps to do me some harm—or he might imagine that I had humbled myself before them, to make friends with them, and that would trouble him more than anything else: you cannot tell what wild fancies might not get into his head. So there must not be a word said about Miss Bethune, Vincent."

"Of course you know best, Maisrie," said he. And still he did not let her go. What was he to say next, to detain her? It was so long since he had heard her voice! "When you go upstairs, Maisrie, I wish you would look at the book of ballads that is lying on the table. There are some lines marked—you will see a bit of paper to tell you the page. Do you know what that means? Your grandfather thought that he might not have strength enough left to speak to me when I came; and so this

was to be a last message for me. Isn't it strange that in the face of so serious an illness he should be thinking about a ballad; but you know better than any one that ballads are as real to your grandfather as the actual things around him. And I want you to look at that message. I have told your grandfather that he may depend on me."

She went upstairs; he passed out into the golden glow of the afternoon. It was not a beautiful village, this: plain, unlovely, melancholy in the last degree; moreover, his own mind was filled with dim and dark forebodings; so that a sort of gloom of death and separation seemed to hang over those houses. Nor was there anything to look at, for the distraction of thought. An English village would have had a picturesque old church and a pretty churchyard; here there was nothing but a small mission-house of the most dull and forbidding exterior, while, just beyond the last of the hovels, there was a cemetery—a mound enclosed by a stone wall. He went to the gate, and stood there a long time, with some curious fancies and imaginings coming into his head. He seemed to see an open grave there, and a small knot of people, himself the chief mourner. And then, after the simple and solemn ceremony, he saw himself leave the sad enclosure and go away back through the unlovely street, rather fearing what lay before him. For how was he to attempt to console the solitary girl awaiting him there in her despair and her tears? But behold now, if there were any charity and commiseration left in the world—if one, hitherto obdurate, would but consent to bury her enmity in that open grave they had left—as well she might, for there was no one to offend her now—and if she were to reach out a woman's hand to this lonely girl, and take her with her, and shelter her, until the time of her sorrow was over? This was a bleak, plain, commonplace sort of a burial ground into which he was gazing: but none the less had human hearts come away from it heavy and remorseful—remorseful when it was too late. And if some little atonement were to be offered in the way he had imagined—if it were the only thing now left? This girl, sitting alone there in her desperate grief—without kindred—without friends—without any home or habitation to turn her face to: surely her situation was of all things possible most forlorn—surely no woman's heart could resist that mute appeal for sympathy and association?

As he walked slowly and aimlessly back to the inn, he began to think he had been a little too hard on those relatives of his.

Death, or even the menace of death, was a solvent of many things: it made all antagonisms, animosities, indignations appear so trivial and unworthy. He could not but remember that it was not through any selfishness those relatives of his had acted (unless some small trace of family ambition were a minor motive): what they had done they had done, as they imagined, to serve him; there might have been errors of judgment, but no ill-will on their part. And now, in this terrible crisis, if he were to write to Lady Musselburgh—write in all conciliation and kindness—and tell her how Maisrie Bethune was situated, would she not allow her heart to answer? She was a woman; she professed to be a Christian. And if the worst befel, or even if the worst were threatened, surely she would come at once to Scotland, and make what little amends were now within her power? How many homes had she—in London, Brighton, Mendover—how many friends, relations, well-wishers—as compared with this tragically lonely girl, who had nothing but the wide world around her, and no one offering her a sympathetic hand? He would write to his aunt a long and urgent letter—appealing to her own better nature—and asking to be allowed to summon her, by telegram, if there were need. He would even humble and abase himself—for Maisrie's sake.

But when he got back to the inn, he found that all these sombre prognostications were, happily, not immediately called for. On the contrary, Maisrie came running down to say that her grandfather had been asleep, or apparently asleep, and that, when he woke up, he seemed much refreshed, with his memory grown infinitely clearer. He was especially proud that he could remember the verses about Allander Water. He wanted Vincent to go up to him at once.

"And you must please him, Vincent," she said, breathlessly, "by promising to do everything to help him with the book. Promise whatever he wishes. But be sure you don't mention that Miss Bethune was here—don't say a word about that—or anything about Balloray."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BABBLE O' GREEN FIELDS: THE END.

THERE was a wonderful vitality, especially of the brain, in this old man; after long periods of languor and exhaustion, with low moanings and mutterings quite unintelligible to the patient watchers, he would flame up into something like his former self, and his speech would become eager and voluble, and almost consecutive. It was in those intervals that he showed himself proud of his recovered memory: again and again they could hear him repeat the lines that for a time had baffled him—

'How sweet to roam by Allander, to breathe the balmy air,
When cloudless are the summer skies, and woods and fields are fair;
To see the skylark soaring high, and chanting on the wing,
While in yon woods near Calder Kirk the wild birds sweetly sing.'

He was busy with the new book—choosing and arranging; and Maisrie, as his amanuensis, jotted down memoranda as to the poets to be included, and the pieces most characteristic of them. For he was not to be pacified into silence and acquiescence—in these clearer moods. There was hurry, he said. Some one else might step in. And he cross-examined Vincent about the quotations that Hugh Anstruther had made at the Burns' Celebration in New York.

"I hardly remember," Vincent answered him. "There were a good many. But there was one piece I thought rather pathetic—I don't recall the name of it—but it was about a little pair of shoes—the mother thinking of her dead child."

"What?—what?" said the old man, quickly. "Not James Smith's? Not 'The Wee Pair o' Shoon'?"

"Well, yes, I think that was the title," said Vincent.

An anxious and troubled expression came into the sick man's eyes: he was labouring with his memory—and Maisrie saw it.

"Never mind, grandfather: never mind just now: if you want it, I'll write to Mr. Anstruther for it. See, I will put it down in the list; and I'll send for it; and it will be back here in plenty of time."

"But I know it quite well!" he said, fretfully. "The last verse anyway. 'The eastlin wind blaws cauld, Jamie—the snaw's on hill and plain——'" He repeated those two lines over and over again, with half-shut eyes; and then all at once he went on with the remainder—

"The flowers that decked my lammie's grave
Are faded noo, an' gane!
O, dinna speak! I ken she dwells
In yon fair land aboon;
But sair's the sicht that blin's my e'e—
That wee, wee pair o' shoon."

There was a kind of proud look in his face as he finished.

"Yes, yes; it's a fine thing to have a good memory—and I owe that to my father—he said there never was a minute in the day that need be wasted—you could always repeat to yourself a verse of the Psalms of David. I think the first word of approval—I ever got from him—ye see, Maisrie, we were brought up under strict government in those days—was when I repeated the CXIX. Psalm—the whole twenty-two parts—with hardly a mistake. And what a talisman to carry about with ye—on the deck of a steamer—on Lake Ontario—in the night—with the stars overhead—then the XLVI. Psalm comes into your mind—you are back in Scotland—you see the small church, and the boxed-in pews—the men and women standing up to sing—the men all in black—I wonder if they have *Ballerma* in the Scotch churches now—and *Drumclog*—and *New St. Ann's*—"

He shut his eyes—those unnaturally brilliant eyes—for a second or so; but the next second they were open and alert again.

"The book, Maisrie—the book—are you getting on?—no delay—no delay—in case someone should interfere. Ye've got *Shairp* in, haven't ye?—the burn of *Quair*—up yonder—above the *Minch Moor*—

'I heard the cushies croon,
Through the gowden afternoon,
And *Quair* burn singin' doon to the vale o' *Tweed*.'

Well do I know the very spot where he must have written those verses. Yes, yes; well I remember it," he continued, more absently. "But I have had my last look. I will see it no

more—no more. You, Maisrie, you will go there—your young husband will take you there—”

“Grandfather, we will all go there together!” said Maisrie, piteously.

“And both of you,” the old man went on, paying no attention to her, for he was apparently gazing at some distant thing, “both of you are young, and light of step—and light of heart, which is still better—well, well, my lass, perhaps not so light of heart as might be at your years—but all that will change for you—and I think when you are up at the burn of Quair—you will find it—in your mind—to cross the Minch Moor to Yarrow Water. Newark Castle you will see—then you will turn to go down the Yarrow Vale—but not with any sad heart, Maisrie—I forbid ye that—it’s a beautiful place, Yarrow, though it had its tragedies and sorrows in the olden time—and you—you are young—you have life before you—and I tell ye it is with a light and glad heart you must go down the Yarrow Vale. Why, lass, you’ll come to Mount Benger—you’ll come to Dryhope Tower—you’ll come to Altrive—and St. Mary’s Loch—and the Loch o’ the Lows—and Chapel-hope—but mind ye now—if it’s bad weather—ye’re not to come running away, and altogether mistaking the place—ye’ll just stop somewhere in the neighbourhood until it clears.” And then he added, in a wistful kind of way: “I once had thoughts—of taking ye there myself, Maisrie.”

“And so you will, grandfather!” she pleaded.

“No more—no more,” he said, as if not heeding her. “And why should a young life be clouded?—the two of them—they’ll be fine company for each other—when they’re wandering—along by the side of Yarrow Water.” But here he recalled himself; and would have Maisrie sit down again to that list; in order that the book might be pushed rapidly forward.

It was on this same evening that Dr. Lenzie, on arriving to pay his accustomed visit, went into the little parlour and sent for Vincent. Vincent came downstairs.

“Do ye see that?” said he, holding out a book that was in his hand.

Vincent took the volume from him and glanced at the title—Recent and Living Scottish Poets, by A. G. Murdoch. He was not in the least astonished—but he was angry and indignant.

“Very well,” said he, “what of it? Do you mean to say you are going to vex an old man, who may be on his death-bed,

by bringing charges of plagiarism against him? I dare say Mr. Bethune never saw the book, or, if he has seen it, he has forgotten it."

"I perceive ye do not understand," said the little doctor, without taking offence. "When I came to know what undertaking it was that Mr. Bethune had on his mind, I made sure I had either seen or heard of some such collection; and I sent to Edinburgh; and here it is, just arrived. Now the one thing he seems anxious about, the one that troubles him, is getting on with this work; and it occurred to me that if I could show him there was a similar book already published, he might cease fretting——"

"Cease fretting!" Vincent exclaimed, with a stare of astonishment. And then he hesitated. "Well, you are an older man than I, and you have more experience in these cases; but I should have said that a cruel disappointment such as this is sure to cause would distress his mind beyond measure. He must occupy himself with something; his brain is incessantly working; and so long as he is talking of getting out his book, he is at least looking forward with hope. But if you show him this volume, it will be a crushing blow; the very thing he seems to live for will be taken from him; he will feel injured by being anticipated, and brood over it. Of course I have no right to speak; I am not a relative; but ask his granddaughter—she knows him better than any one——"

"Perhaps you are right—perhaps you are right," said the little doctor. "It was merely an idea of mine—thinking it would quiet him. But on reflection I will not risk it; it may be better not to risk it."

"In that case," Vincent struck in, promptly, "will you let me tie up the book in paper, and will you take it away with you when you go? I mean, that I don't wish Miss Bethune to see it. She has plenty to think of at present: don't worry her with a trifling matter like this. It is of no consequence to her, or to any human being, how many collections of Scotch poems may be published—the more the merrier—so long as readers can be found for them; but she is anxious and nervous and tired at present—and it might surprise her, perhaps vex her, to find that this volume had been published."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," the doctor said, taking the failure of his ingenious little scheme with much equanimity. "I will put the book into that sideboard drawer until I come

down; and then I can take it away with me without her or any one having seen it."

The next day brought Vincent an unexpected and welcome surprise. He had been out-of-doors for a brief breathing-space, and was returning to the inn, when he saw in the distance, coming down the Cupar road, a waggonette and pair. He seemed somehow to recognise the two figures seated in the carriage; looked again; at last made certain—they were Lord and Lady Musselburgh. Of course, in such circumstances, when they drove up to the door of the inn, there was no great joyfulness of greeting; only a few customary questions, and professions of hope for the best; but at the same time, Vincent, who was touched by this friendly act, could not help saying—

"Well, this is like you, aunt."

"Oh, your letter was too much for me, Vin," she said, with frank good nature. "I did not wait for the telegram—I trust there will be no need to telegraph for anybody. But I don't want you to give me any credit. I want to appear as I am; and I've always told you I'm a selfish woman—the generous creature is Hubert here, who insisted on coming all this distance with me. And now I want you to understand the full extent of my selfishness. You are doing no good here—of course. You are probably in the way. But all your affairs in London will be compromised if you remain here: ——'s private secretary cannot be absent at such a time——"

"There's St. John!" Vincent exclaimed, referring to his colleague in the office that had been put in commission.

"He's not in the House," rejoined this practical and very charming person; "and the short and the long of it is that you must get back to London at once. That is part of my scheme; the other is, that I shall take your place. I shall be of more use. You say there is no immediate danger. So much the better. Go away back to your post. If anything should happen—I could be of more service than you. What could you do? Miss Bethune could not return to London with you—and go into lodgings of your choosing. I will look after her—if she will allow me—if she will let bygones be bygones. I will ask her pardon, or do anything; but I don't suppose she is thinking of that at present. You go back with Hubert and leave me here. I can shift for myself."

"I think it is a sensible arrangement," her husband said, idly looking round at the rather shabby furniture.

"It is very kind of you, aunt," Vincent said—"and very

far from being selfish. But it is impossible. I must remain here. I have duties here as well as elsewhere—perhaps more important in my own sight. But—but—now that you are here—”

“Oh, yes, I’ll stay,” said she good-naturedly. “Well, Hubert, it is you who are packed off: I suppose you can return to Edinburgh to-night. I brought a few things with me, Vincent, in case I should be wanted: will you fetch them in from the waggonette? Still, I wish I could persuade you to go back to London!”

And in this manner it was that Lady Musselburgh became installed in the inn, making some little excuses to Maisrie. She and her husband had been in the neighbourhood. They had heard of Mr. Bethune’s serious illness, and of Vincent’s having come down from town. Could she be of any help? And so forth. Maisrie thanked her, of course; but did not take much notice of her; the girl just then having many things in her mind. For her grandfather’s delirium was at times more pronounced now; and in these paroxysms she alone could soothe him.

Lady Musselburgh, indeed, rather hung back from entering the sick-room, without stating her reasons to anyone. On every occasion that she saw Maisrie she was most kind and considerate, and solicitous about the girl herself; but she betrayed no great concern about the old man, further than by making the usual enquiries. When Vincent suggested to her that, if she did not go into the room and see Mr. Bethune, his granddaughter might think it strange, she said in reply—

“But he won’t remember me, Vin. We never met but at Henley.”

“He remembers everything that ever happened to him, was the answer. “His memory is wonderful. And perhaps—afterwards—you may wish you had said a civil word or two.”

“Oh, very well,” she said. “Whatever you think right. Will you come with me now?”

She seemed a little apprehensive—she did not say why. They went upstairs together. The door of the sick-room was open. Maisrie, when she perceived this visitor, rose from her seat by the bedside; but Lady Musselburgh motioned her to keep her place, while she remained standing in the middle of the room, waiting to see if Mr. Bethune would take any notice of her. But his eyes were turned away; and he was muttering

to himself almost inaudibly—they could only catch a word here and there—Galashiels—Torwoodlee—Selkirk—Jedburgh—no doubt he was going over in his own mind those scenes of his youth. Then Maisrie said, very gently—

“Grandfather!”

He turned his eyes, and they rested on the stranger for a second or so, with a curiously puzzled expression. She went forward to the bedside.

“I’m afraid you don’t remember me,” said she, diffidently. “It was at Henley we met——”

“I remember you very well, madam, very well indeed,” said he, receiving her with a sort of old-fashioned and ceremonious politeness—as far as the wasted frame and poor wandering wits would allow. “I am sorry—to have to welcome you—to so poor a house—these are altered conditions truly——” He was still looking curiously at her. “Yes, yes, I remember you well, madam—and—and I will not fail to send you my monograph on the—the Beaton of the Western Isles—I will not fail to send it—but if ye will forgive me—my memory is so treacherous—will you forgive me, madam, if your name has escaped me for the moment——”

“This is Lady Musselburgh, grandfather,” Maisrie interposed quietly.

“Musselburgh—Musselburgh,” he said; and then he went on, amid the pauses of his laborious breathing: “Ah, yes—your husband, madam, is a fine young man—and a good Scot—audacious, intrepid, and gallant—perhaps a little cynical in public affairs—great measures want earnest convictions—it may be that his lot has fallen in over-pleasant places—and he has chosen the easier path. Well, why not?—why not? There are some whose fate it is to—to fight a hard fight; while others—others find nothing but smoothness and peace—let them thank Heaven for it—and enjoy it. I hope he will hold on his way with a noble cheerfulness—despising the envy of enemies—a noble cheerfulness—I hope it may be his always—indeed I know none deserving of better fortune.”

It was now abundantly clear to Lady Musselburgh that he did not in any way associate her with the arrangement that had been effected by George Morris; and she was much relieved.

“I mustn’t disturb you any longer,” said she. “Indeed, I only came along to see if I could be of any assistance to Miss Bethune. I hear she has been doing far too much.

Now that is very unwise; for when you are getting better, and need constant care, then she will find herself quite worn out."

"Yes, yes, that is right," said he, "I wish ye would persuade her—take her in hand—make her look after herself—but she has a will of her own, the creature—a slim bit of a lass, ye might think—but it's the spirit that endures—shining clear—clearer and clearer in dark times of trouble. And she—she has had her own troubles—and suffering—but never a word of complaining—obedient—willing—ready at all times and seasons—loyal—dutiful—and brave. What more could I say of her?—what more? Sometimes I have thought to myself—there was the—the courage of a man in that slim bit creature—and the gentleness of all womankind as well—"

"Grandfather," said Maisrie, "you mustn't talk any more now—you are keeping Lady Musselburgh waiting."

"But, madam," he continued, not heeding the girl at all, "you must remember her descent—she comes of an inflexible race—she is of pure blood—it is the thoroughbred that holds on till its heart breaks in two. How could she help being proud-spirited, and silent in endurance, and brave? Perhaps you may know that it was of one of her ancestors—as he lay in his grave—that some one said—'There lies one who never feared the face of man,'—a noble inscription for a tombstone—'who never feared the face of man'—"

Maisrie leant over and said to him, quite gently—

"Grandfather, you are forgetting; it was of John Knox that was said."

He looked at her doubtfully; and then seemed to be puzzling with his own memory.

"Perhaps—perhaps," he said; and then he added, quite humbly, "I beg your pardon for misleading you, madam—I did not intend it—but I forget things—and Maisrie is generally right. John Knox?—perhaps—perhaps—I thought it was a Beaton or a Bethune—but I cannot remember which of them—perhaps she is right—"

He closed his eyes, and turned away a little, as if to debate this question with himself—or perhaps to seek some rest: seeing which Lady Musselburgh and Vincent quietly withdrew, and went downstairs.

"Poor old man!" said she, when they were in the small parlour. "There is a great change in him, entirely apart from his illness. Even in manner he is not nearly so—so grandiose

as he used to be : sometimes he was quite humble. And as for her—my heart bleeds for her. I will do anything you like, Vin—if she will accept. What is more, I will confess to you now that, as far as she is concerned, I am convinced I was quite wrong. You were right : your eyes were wide open, after all. How can one judge of any one by an afternoon and an evening at Henley? That was my only chance. Then perhaps there was a little excuse for prejudice—there was the association—. But we'll say no more about that. I confess I was wrong ; you were right. That girl is as true as steel. If she gives her husband half the devotion she bestows on that old man, he'll do very well." She looked at her nephew. Then she said suddenly : " Vin, you don't say a word. I believe you have never forgiven me one bit ! "

" Oh, yes, I have, aunt," he made answer, uneasily. " But there are some things that need never have happened."

She regarded him again.

" Vin, you are too unforgiving ! But can I not make up ? See, now ! If Miss Bethune is left alone—I should like to call her Maisrie, if she will let me : indeed I should : but it is so difficult to get any nearer her—she is all wrapped up in her anxiety about her grandfather : well, if she is left alone, I will take her with me. I will take her to London. She will stay with me ; there will be a home for her there, at any rate ; and we may become better friends. Oh, I know we shall ; it is only that at present she cares for nothing, and thinks of nothing, but her duty towards her grandfather. I intend to be very kind to her—I intend to win her affection if I can—"

" And I shall be very grateful to you, aunt," said he. " But it is hardly time yet to speak of such a thing : Mr. Bethune has always had a wonderful constitution."

" Did you notice how reticent the doctor was this morning ? " she asked,—and he did not answer.

But at least one thing that Lady Musselburgh had observed and mentioned was true : much, if not all, of the old grandiose manner had gone away from George Bethune. If on rare occasions some flash of defiance flamed up—as if he were still face to face with adversity and disappointment, and determined not to abate one jot of his pride and independence—he was ordinarily quite gentle and even humble, especially towards Maisrie. On this same evening he said—

" Margaret " (as he sometimes called her now, forgetting) " will ye read to me the XLVI. Psalm ? "

She went and got the book and began—

“God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid;
Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid :
Though hills amidst the sea be cast;
Though waters roaring make,
And troubled be; yea, though the hills
By swelling seas do shake.

“A river is, whose streams do glad
The city of our God;
The holy place, wherein the Lord
Most high hath his abode.
God in the midst of her doth dwell;
Nothing shall her remove:
The Lord to her our helper will,
And that right early, prove.”

But when she had got so far, he said—

“Margaret—I hope ye will not take it ill—if I interrupt ye—it is no unkindness I mean, my lass—but, ye see, ye’ve got the English speech, as is natural—and I was trying to think how my father used to read out the Psalm at family worship—and ye’ve not got the Scotch way—nor the strong emphasis—how could ye?—how could ye? Ye’ll not take it ill,” he went on, with the most piteous concern visible in his face—“ye’ll not think it’s any unkindness——”

“No, no, no, grandfather!” she said. “Of course not. Shall I ask Mrs. MacGill to come up, to read to you in the Scotch way?”

“No, no one but you, Maisrie—no one but you—perhaps if you take the CXXVI. Psalm—‘When Sion’s bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we’—I mind they used to sing that to the tune of *Kilmarnock*—and the young women’s voices sounded beautiful. But you’re not vexed, Maisrie!—for I did not mean any unkindness to ye, my dear——”

“No, no, grandfather,” she said; and she turned to this other Psalm, and read it to him; and even after that it was some time before she could assure him that she had not been in the least hurt.

Two more of those long and anxious days went by; the fever waxing and waning by turns; but all the time the strength of that once powerful frame was slowly ebbing away. For one thing, his mind was well content. He had no more anxiety about Maisrie; he appeared to regard her future as well

assured. He lay quietly murmuring to himself; and they could make out, from chance sentences here and there, that he was going over his boyhood's days again—bird's-nesting in the spring woods, making swaying seats out of the shelving branches of the beeches, guddling for trout in the small hill burns. An old refrain seemed to haunt him—

'Beyond thee, dearie, beyond thee, dearie,
And O to be lying beyond thee:
O sweetly, soundly, weel may he sleep,
That's laid in the bed beyond thee.'

'*Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde*': that phrase also returned again and again. And then he would go back to his school-days, and tell Maisrie about a little patch of garden that had been given all to himself; how he had watched the yellow spears of the crocuses pierce the dry earth, and the green buds begin to show on the currant-bushes; how he had planted scarlet-runners, and stuck the wands in, and trained the young shoots; how he had waited for the big red globes of the peonies to unroll; how he had white monkshood, and four distinct colours of columbine. Then his pets; his diversions; his terrible adventures—half-drowned in a mill-dam—lost in a snowstorm on Laidlaw moor—the horrors of a certain churchyard which he had sometimes to pass, alone on the dark winter evenings. Maisrie did not seek to interrupt him. There was no agitation in these wandering reminiscences. Nay, they seemed to soothe him; and sometimes he sank into an altogether dozing state.

"Vincent," said Lady Musselburgh, when these two happened to find themselves together, in the room below, "have you no authority over that girl? She is killing herself!"

"It is no use remonstrating," said he. "She knows what the doctor has not dared to tell her. She sees that her grandfather is so weak he may slip away at any moment, without a word or a sign."

But on the evening of this second day, the old man, with such remnant of his former resolution and defiance as still clung to him, seemed to try to shake off this fatal lethargy—if only to say farewell. And in this last hour or so of his life, the spectacle that George Bethune presented was no unworthy one. Death, or the approach of death, which ennobles even the poorest and the meanest, was now dealing with this man; and all the husks and histrionic integuments that had obscured or hidden his

true nature seemed to fall away from him. He stood out himself—no pressure of poverty distorting his mind—no hopeless regrets embittering his soul. It was Scotland he thought of. In those last minutes and moments, the deepest passion of his heart—an intense and proud love of his native land—burned pure and strong and clear; and if he showed any anxiety at all, it was merely that Maisrie, who was a kind of stranger, should form a liking for this country to which she, too, in a measure, belonged—that she should see it under advantageous conditions—that she should think of all that had been said of those hills and vales, and endow them with that added charm.

“But I do not fear,” he said (his eyes, with some brilliancy still left in them, fixed on her, his voice low and panting). “You have an inheritance, Maisrie—it is in your blood—a sympathy—an insight—Scotland claims you—as one of her own. I knew that when—when—you used to play the Scotch airs for me—the trembling string, that made the soul tremble too—‘The sun shines bright in France’—‘The Lowlands o’ Holland, that twined my love and me’—it was Scotch blood that made them thrill. Ye’ll not be disappointed, Margaret—ye’ll understand—when ye get to Yarrow—and Ettrick Water—and the murmur of the Tweed. I meant—to have taken ye myself—but it was not to be—ye’ll have younger and happier guidance—as is but natural—I—I wish ye both well. And—and I would like ye—to go in the spring-time, Maisrie—and—and if ye could find out William Motherwell’s grave—I have forgotten where it is—my memory is not what it used to be—but if ye could find out Motherwell’s grave—ye might put a handful of primroses on it—for the sake of—of *Jeanie Morrison*.

He relapsed into silence; his breathing grew more laboured and also feebler; it was evident to those standing by that the end was not far off now. Maisrie sate holding his hand in hers; the fountain of her tears all dried up; her tragic grief seemed to have turned her to stone. Even those spring days of which he had spoken—when she would have her young husband by her side—they would want something. Her grandfather had been kind to her; and they had been through many years together.

He lay thus for nearly half-an-hour, the tide of life slowly receding. He made but one final effort to speak—nay, for a second, it seemed as if he would raise his head to give effect to his last proud protestation.

"Maisrie—Maisrie—they never saw me cowed—never once! I met—ill fortune—or good—face to face. . . I held—by the watchword—of our house—Stand—Fast—Craig-Royston! . . ."

It was his last breath. And so, with a lie on his lips, but with none in his heart, old George Bethune passed away: passed away from a world that had perhaps understood him but none too well.

THE END.

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